

# **THE BEGĀR & BETH SYSTEM IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

*A Study of Erstwhile Shimla Hill States*

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BEGARIS RENDEING BEGAR

# **THE BEGĀR & BETH SYSTEM IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

*A Study of Erstwhile Shimla Hill States*

**Jaideep Negi**

Foreword by  
**VIRBHADRA SINGH**  
Chief Minister  
*Himachal Pradesh*



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**DEDICATED TO THE SACRED MEMORY OF  
MY GRANDMOTHER JANKI DEVI**

# JAMMU AND KASHMIR



- |              |              |            |              |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 1. Bushahar  | 8. Kumarsain | 15. Ratesh | 22. Beja     |
| 2. Rawingarh | 9. Darkoti   | 16. Koti   | 23. Mahlog   |
| 3. Dhadi     | 10. Ghund    | 17. Madhan | 24. Kunihar  |
| 4. Tharoch   | 11. Balson   | 18. Dhami  | 25. Nalagarh |
| 5. Shangri   | 12. Jubal    | 19. Bhajji | 26. Baghal   |
| 6. Khaneti   | 13. Keonthal | 20. Baghat | 27. Mangal   |
| 7. Delath    | 14. Theog    | 21. Kuthar | 28. Bilaspur |

## INDEX

ERSTWHILE



SHIMLA HILL STATES

## Foreword

Some system of unpaid or free extraction of labour service has been almost a defining characteristic of feudal societies the World over. The Hill States of Himachal Pradesh in the past were no exception to this. The systems of serfdom prevalent here in the past were known as *begār* and *beth*. In the beginning these systems were reciprocal in that in exchange for the unpaid services, the peasant serfs could expect, and were extended protection and insurance against adversity. However, these reciprocal arrangements were undermined and the system was corrupted under the suzerainty of the British.

Shri Jaideep Negi has carefully studied the institutions of *begār* and *beth* as prevalent in the erstwhile Shimla Hill States. In this endeavour, he has together put source material from different libraries and archives. His study of the socio-economic system of the Shimla Hill States deserves appreciation.

I hope this study by Shri Jaideep Negi will encourage other researchers to undertake similar studies that may reveal many of the little known but significant aspects of the history of Himachal Pradesh.



(Virbhadra Singh)  
Chief Minister,  
Himachal Pradesh

## Preface

[ *Begār* and *Beth*, the compulsory unpaid service to the ruler and landlord by the peasantry was prevalent in the hills from a very early period in history. At that time it was a necessity and formed an integral part of the social and economic life of the hill people. It was related to land and was a part of land revenue.] In older days hill society was broadly divided into two classes—the upper class and the lower class. The upper class was formed by feudal lords, *jagirdars* and big land holders. They possessed the best and most fertile land. But they were not cultivators themselves. The other class was constituted by the common people of the lower strata of society who were either landless or possessed very little and unfertile land. This class also included the artisans like ironsmith, potters, leather-workers, weavers, etc. In order to cultivate their vast fields, build domestic or defensive houses and carry loads up in the hills and valleys, the government officials, the feudal lords and their kith and kin used the people of the lower strata of society. For these services the subordinated classes were given a certain quantity of foodgrain at the time of harvesting. Some were given a piece of land to cultivate for themselves. People who were compelled to perform these acts of hard labour were locally known as *begāri* and *bethu*. This system of *begār* and *beth* seems to have been suited particularly suitable for the dominant classes of the hill society. The demands of the *raja* and his court were limited by economic circumstances and the economy was underdeveloped. The degree of monetization was low and most of the transactions were done by way of exchange of commodities.

After the expulsion of the Gorkhas in A.D., 1815 the mountainous area between the rivers Tons and Sutlej came under the control of the English East India Company. The British restored the overrun territories to their respective rulers and granted them *sanads*. According to these *sanads* that were granted to each ruler it was made imperative on them to maintain roads in their respective territories and to make available an adequate number of *begāris* whenever needed by touring British officials and other European travellers. No or only nominal wages were paid to these *begāris*. This seriously disrupted the agricultural work of the hill peasantry in their fields. The *begār* and *beth* system had become of a particularly oppressive nature by the beginning of 20th century.

With the awakening of political consciousness in the hill society and the opening of the area to the outside world in the 20th century, a great resentment against this beastly system began to arise in the mind of the hill peasantry. This system had taken the form of a social evil. The hill people began to organise themselves against this social evil and demanded its abolition. With the independence of the country on 15th August, 1947 and the formation of Himachal Pradesh on 15th April, 1948, steps were taken by the government to abolish this inhuman system. Finally *begār* and *beth* was prohibited in Himachal Pradesh from 1948. The pathetic stories of this *begār* and *beth* system still horrify and grip the minds of many of the elderly people of the state. Some of these stories attracted my interest. It was in order to know more about its origin, its working, and its multifaceted nature that I studied some archival material and contemporary unpublished literature. Whatever I have understood of this question and the conclusions that I have arrived at are presented in this monograph.

In the course of this research I have utilized some material, illustrations, sketches, etc. from some old books. All these works have been mentioned in the bibliography.

The Appendices 1-7 are taken from the unpublished original files which are exclusively on *Begār* and *Beth*. These appendices seem to be very important so far as this book is concerned. None has so far mentioned about these documents. These appendices are taken from original files from H.P. States Archives. These show the stages of *Begār* and *Beth* system and its commutation into cash and total abolition.

I express my gratitude towards Dr. Chetan Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of history, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, who guided me like a teacher and worked with me like a friend in my work. I am also indebted to Mian Goverdhan Singh for the valuable help and guidance he rendered to me. I should also place on record my gratefulness to the Himachal Pradesh Secretariat Library and the Himachal Pradesh State Archives, Shimla and its staff.

And lastly, but by no means the least, I express my profound gratitude to my grandfather, Sh. Kalag Ram Negī, my better-half Smt. Babita Negi, my parents and brothers for the encouragement and help that I received from them while engaged in this work. I am grateful to Dr. S.K. Bhatia, Prop., M/S Reliance Publishing House for publishing this work in record time.

**JAIDEEP NEGI**

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## Chapter-I

# *Shimla Hill States: An Introduction*

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Before the advent of the British into the hills now included in the modern districts of Shimla, Solan and Kinnaur, the mountainous area lying between the rivers Tons and Sutlej was known as that of the *Bara Thakurais* (Twelve Lordships) and the *Athara Thakurais* (Eighteen Lordships). The earliest mention of these *Thakurais* has been made by James Baillie Frazer, who was a civilian with an unit of British troops who fought against the Gorkhas in the Anglo-Gorkha war of A.D. 1815. He has given the following list of these *Thakurais*:<sup>1</sup>

### *Bara Thakurais*

- |             |           |             |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. Keonthal | 5. Bhajji | 9. Kiaree   |
| 2. Baghal   | 6. Dhami  | 10. Kotgarh |
| 3. Kuthar   | 7. Mehlog | 11. Theog   |
| 4. Kunihar  | 8. Koti   | 12. Baghat  |

### *Athara Thakurais*

- |              |                |                 |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Jubbal    | 7. Tharoch     | 13. Koti-Madhan |
| 2. Balson    | 8. Morni       | 14. Ghund       |
| 3. Kumarsain | 9. Beja        | 15. Bharoli     |
| 4. Delath    | 10. Dodra Kwar | 16. Seelee      |
| 5. Rawin     | 11. Saree      |                 |
| 6. Karangla  | 12. Ratesh     |                 |

Another list of these *Thakurais* has been given by Captain C.P. Kennedy, who was the Superintendent of the Hill States from 1822 to 1835. This list included:<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. James Baillie Frazer, *Journal of a Tour through parts of the Snowy range of the Himala Mountains and the sources of the River Jumna and Ganga*, London, 1820, p.53
  2. *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency*, Vol. I, Lahore, Punjab Govt. 1911. pp. 256-57.

*Bara Thakurais*

- |              |             |                            |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Keonthal  | 7. Mehlog   |                            |
| 2. Baghat    | 8. Dhami    |                            |
| 3. Baghal    | 9. Koti     | } Tributories of Keonthal. |
| 4. Kuthar    | 10. Kiaree  |                            |
| 5. Kumarsian | 11. Kunihar |                            |
| 6. Bhajji    | 12. Mehlog  |                            |

*Athara Thakurais*

- |                                   |   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Jubbal                         | 11. Theog                                       | } Tributories of Keonthal. |
| 2. Kotgarh                        | 12. Ghund                                       |                            |
| 3. Balson                         | 13. Punder                                      |                            |
| 4. Rawin, retained by the British | 14. Bharoli (was sold to Balson)                |                            |
| 5. Khaneti                        | } are tributories and incorporated with Bushahr |                            |
| 6. Karangla                       |   |                            |
| 7. Delath                         |   |                            |
| 8. Saree                          |   |                            |
| 9. Nawar                          |   |                            |
| 10. Dodra Kwar                    | 15. Beja  |                            |
|                                   | 16. Shangri                                     |                            |
|                                   | 17. Darkoti                                     |                            |
|                                   | 18. Tharoch                                     |                            |

There is also a third list of the *thakurais* which has been given by Captain R. Ross, who was the first Political Agent of these *thakurais*.<sup>3</sup>

In the above mentioned records and other literature written upto 1830 the twelve and eighteen *Thakurais* listed separately were called by the names of *Bara Thakurais* and *Athara Thakurais* respectively.

There are discrepancies in the lists given by James Baillie Frazer, C.P. Kennedy and R. Ross. Frazer includes the *Thakurais* of Kotgarh and Theog in the list of *Bara Thakurais*, which were spread in the upper hill valleys whereas Capt. Kennedy includes them in the *Athara*

3. John Pamble, As quoted by him in the footnote in his book, *Invasion of Nepal*, Oxford, 1971, p.21.

*Thakurais*. The *Thakurai* of Kumarsain which was also in the upper hill valley, has been included in the list of *Bara Thakurais* by Capt. Kennedy and Capt. Ross whereas Frazer mentions it in *Athara Thakurais*. The major discrepancy in the list of Capt. Ross is that he only includes fourteen *Thakurais* in the list of *Athara Thakurais*.

The *Bara Thakurais* were spread in the lower Shimla hills and the *Athara Thakurais* were in the upper hill valleys of the rivers Sutlej, Pabar and Tons.

Among the *Athara Thakurais* some were of considerable size and importance, particularly Jubbal which had far long been a prey to internal dissensions.<sup>4</sup>

Bushahr was outside the region of these *Thakurais* which was also in the upper Sutlej valley. It was one of the oldest of the hill states in the Western Himalayas. It has not been mentioned in any record of these *Thakurais*.

Nalagarh and Bilaspur, which were spread in the lower Shimla Hills, had not also been included in any list of these *Thakurais*.

Captain Kennedy includes the name of Dodra Kwar in the list of the *Athara Thakurais*. This region is situated in the upper basin of the Tons river between Garhwal and Rohroo valley. It appears that it was under local chief who was tributary to Bushahr.

According to Edward Buck, the first mention of Shimla was made by an officer of the East India Company, who when accompanying Gorkha troops from Sabathu to Kotgarh in about 1816, passed through Shimla, which was then a dense forest infested with wild beast.<sup>5</sup> On his return from Kotgarh he reported to Captain Ross, Assistant Political Agent for the Hill States, about the cool place at which he had rested, namely Shimla. Part of the hill over which the station of Shimla spreads was retained by British Government at the close of the Gorkha war in 1816. Captain Ross, erected the first residence, a thatched wooden cottage in 1819. Captain C.P. Kannady built a permanent cottage at Shimla in 1822 and started to visit it during summer.<sup>6</sup>

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4. *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency*, Lahore, Punjab Govt. Press, 1911, p. 257.

5. Edward J. Buck, *Simla Past and Present*, Shimla, Reprint, 1989, p. 4.

6. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 383

In 1817 Captain Alexander Gereard who was the surveyor of the East Indian Company, mentioned Shimla, a middling size village when he was on his way to Kinnaur. He stopped here during the day and encamped at a hut at Jakhoo.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1824, European gentlemen, chiefly invalids from the plains, had with the permission of the Maharaja of Patiala and the Rana of Keonthal, established themselves in this locality and built their houses on sites granted them rent free.<sup>8</sup> In summer 1827, Lord Amherst, the Governor-General, visited Shimla and held a *darbar* of the Hill Chiefs. From that date importance of Shimla as a sanitarium for the sick rose rapidly into favour with the European population of northern India and every year more and more people started to visit Shimla.

The government acquired the adjoining areas of Shimla from Keonthal State and Patiala State in 1830 and 1843 respectively, for developing Shimla as a hill station for the European.<sup>9</sup> The Governors-General after Lord Amherst, started to visit Shimla regularly during the summer season and it formed an advantageous spot for receiving the great chiefs of northern India, numbers of whom annually come to Shimla to pay their respect.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it seems likely that with the development of Shimla as an important hill-station, the *Bara Thakurais* and the *Athara Thakurais* came to be known after Shimla as the Shimla Hill States.

After the expulsion of the Gorkhas in 1815, by the British Government with the help of the chiefs of hill states, these states came under the protection of British Government. The Hill States were formed in accordance with British Government's decision to restore as far as possible, the position of affairs existing at the beginning of Gorkha occupation, with the reservation of the states to be independent of one another and subject to the British Government.<sup>11</sup>

The British Government granted *sanads* to the chiefs of the

7. Captain Alexander Gereard, *Account of Koonawar in the Himalaya*, London, 1841, p. 197.

8. *Simla District Gazetteer*, 1888-89, Lahore, p. 28.

9. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 378.

10. *Ibid.* p. 383.

11. *Punjab State Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911, p. 5.

*Thakurais*. The *Thakurais* of Kumarsian, Balson, Kuthar, Mangal and Dhami were constituted into separate chiefships and granted independent *sanads* while the *Thakurais* of Khaneti and Delath were conferred upon the state of Bushahr. The *Thakurais* of Rawin and Dhadi were given to Jubbal and those of Koti, Theog, Madhan, Ghund and Ratesh to Keonthal. The states in which the cantonment and forts of Sabathu, Kotgarh and Rawin were situated were retained by the British Government.<sup>12</sup>

The following were the dates of the *sanads* granted to the *thakurais* and the name of their chiefs:<sup>13</sup>

1. Bilaspur	Raja Maha Chand	6th March, 1815.
2. Baghal	Raja Jagat Singh	3rd Sept., 1815.
3. Kuthar	Rana Bhup Singh	3rd Sept., 1815.
4. Baghat	Rana Mohinder Singh	4th Sept., 1815.
5. Bhajji	Rana Ruder Pal	4th Sept., 1815.
6. Dhami	Goverdhan Singh	4th Sept., 1815.
7. Mehlog	Thakur Sansar Chand	4th Sept., 1815.
8. Beja	Thakur Man Chand	4th Sept., 1815.
9. Keonthal	Rana Sansar Chand	6th Sept., 1815.
10. Balson	Thakur Jog Raj	6th Sept., 1815.
11. Nalagarh	Raja Ram Singh	20th Oct., 1815.
12. Jubbal	Rana Puran Chand	18th Nov., 1815.
13. Shangri	Rana Bikramjeet Singh	16th Dec., 1815.
14. Mangal	Rana Bahadur Singh	20th Dec., 1815.
15. Darkoti	Rana Sutes Ram	1815.
16. Kunihar	Thakur Mangan Deo	1815.
17. Kumarsain	Rana Kehar Singh	7th Feb., 1816.
18. Bushahr	Raja Mohinder Singh	8th Feb., 1816.
19. Tharoch	Thakur Jobhu	31st Jan., 1819.

12. See C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring countries*, Vol. IX, Calcutta, 1892, pp. 111 to 160.

13. *Ibid.* pp. 111 to 160.

By these *Sanads* the chieftans of the Hill States were put under certain obligations towards the British Government. They were to allow free passage to the British merchants and their goods in their territories. They had to furnish *begāris* and construct roads and also repair old ones in their respective territories. The bigger states were bound to join the British army with their armed retainers and hill porters when called upon to do so at the time of war. They were required to redress the grievances of their people, promote their welfare, working conditions and to ensure the safety of the roads. The chiefs exercised full ruling powers in their respective territories but the capital punishment passed by the chiefs required to be confirmed by the Superintendent Shimla Hill States before it was carried out.<sup>14</sup>

Darkoti was the only *Thakurai*, (the smallest of the independent Hill States) which was not under any obligation in respect of *begār* or supplies for the use of British troops.<sup>15</sup>

Bushahr was the only state from which an annual tribute of Rs. 15,000/- was exacted (*sanad* No. III) by the British Government on the restoration of the states to the Hill chiefs. In 1847, this tribute was reduced to Rs. 3,945/- as a compensation for the abolition of transit duty.<sup>16</sup>

After the establishment of British control and influence in this region twenty-eight Hill States came to constitute the Shimla Hill States. The following were the Shimla Hill States:<sup>17</sup>

1. Bilaspur (Kahlur)	7. Koti	Zaildars with Keonthal
2. Bushahr	8. Theog	
3. Delath	9. Madhan	
4. Khaneti	10. Ghund	
5. Nalagarh (Hindur)	11. Ratesh	
6. Keonthal	12. Jubbal	

14. See C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring countries*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1931, pp. 70-110.

15. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, B.No. 19. S.No. 489, no paging.

16. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring countries*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1931, p. 16.

17. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911, p. 5.



13. Kumarsian	21. Baghat	
14. Bhajji	22. Mangal	
15. Mehlog	23. Beja	
16. Balson	24. Darkoti	
17. Dhami	25. Tharoch	
18. Kuthar	26. Shangri	
19. Kunihar	27. Rawin	feudatories of Jubbal
20. Baghal	28. Dhadi	

The Deputy Commissioner of Shimla, who functioned under the watchful eye of both the Imperial and Punjab Governments, was the ex-officio Superintendent of the Shimla Hill States.<sup>18</sup>

Earlier, Sirmaur was included in the Shimla Hill States, but was separated from them in 1890.<sup>19</sup>

The Shimla Hill States surrounded the sanitarium of Shimla and extended between latitude 30° 46' and 32° 5' North and 76° 28' and 79° 14' East.<sup>20</sup> They were bounded on the south by the Pinjore *tahsil* of Patiala State, Sirmaur and the Ambala district; on the West by the Hoshiarpur and Kangra districts; on the north by Mandi and Suket States and Kullu. In the east the main Himalayan range divided Bushahr from Garhwal.<sup>21</sup>

The *Rajas* of the Shimla Hill States were *Rajputs*,<sup>22</sup> whose ancestor came from the Indian plains between the 8th and 12th centuries, under the various conditions and settled in the Western Himalayas. This led to the rise of these powerful hill principalities.

Bilaspur state was included amongst the Shimla Hill States for a long time and remained under the political control of the Punjab Government. It was excluded from the Shimla Hill States when the

18. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1931, p. 14.

19. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911, p. 5.

20. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 385.

21. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, Lahore, 1911, p. 1.

22. *Memoranda on the Indian States*, Delhi, 1939, p. 248.

Punjab States Agency was formed in 1921 and was brought into direct relations with the Government of India.<sup>23</sup> After the exclusion of Bilaspur, the number of the Shimla Hill States was reduced to twenty-seven.

After the exclusion of Bilaspur the Shimla Hill States occupied an area of 5489 sq. miles and had a population of 3,30,850 in 1931. Bushahr was the largest state covering an area of 3820 sq. miles which was about three-fourths of the total area of the Shimla Hill States and its population was 1,00,192. Ratesh was the smallest State covering an area of 2 sq. miles with a population of 558.<sup>24</sup>

The mountains form a continuous series of ranges, ascending from the low hills which bound the plains of Ambala to the great central chain of the Western Himalayas. The height of these states ranges from about 915 metres above the sea level which is the lower most part in the south to 7,000 meters in Kinnaur which was the northern most part of the Bushahr state. To the south and east of Shimla, the hills lying between the Satluj and the Tons, centre upon the great chur peak, 11982 feet high,<sup>25</sup> which is the highest peak in the lower ranges and also forms the boundary of Shimla district and Sirmaur district in the present context.

In the Indian sub-continent the Shimla region has the unique distinction of providing water to both the Indus and Gangetic basins. The principal rivers by which the drainage of these hills is effected are the Sutlej, the Pabhar, the Giri or Giri Ganga, the Gambhar and the Sirsa. The Sutlej rises from the southern slopes of Kailash mountain, the Shiva's paradise of Puranic lore. It enters Bushahr state at Shipkee pass. Only the Bushahr state was situated on either banks of the Sutlej and all the other states were on the southern bank of that river.<sup>26</sup> Its tributories in Bushahr are the Baspa from the south and the Spiti from the north. The Nogli stream joins it near Rampur Bushahr, from this point it formed the boundary of the Shimla Hill States, until, shortly before reaching the border of Kangra proper, it turns southwards and passes through the States of Bilaspur and enters the Punjab plains at Bhakra. The Pabar, which is one of the principal feeders of the Tons and therefore, of the

23. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring countries*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1931, p. 14.

24. *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XVII, Punjab-II Tables, Lahore, 1933, p. 3.

25. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 386.

26. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911, p. 1.



Jamuna rises from Chander Nahar lake near Chansal peak, south of Kinnaur, in Rohru, in the Bushahr state. The Giri river rises from the Kupper peak just above the Jubbal town in the Jubbal state and it turns south-east and enters the state of Sirmaur. Its tributary is Ashni or Assan river, which rises near Mahasu in Shimla and joins the Giri before that river enter Sirmaur. The Gambhar rises in the Dagshai hill and running north-west passes Sabathu and joins into the Sutlej about 8 miles below the town of Bilaspur. The Sirsa collects the drainage of the Dun of Nalagarh. Except the Sirsa all are perennial and the Pabar is fed from perennial snow.<sup>27</sup>

The climatic conditions of Shimla Hill States varied from semi-tropical to the semi-arctic on account of the differences in elevation. The climate of Nalagarh, Solan, Rampur and Sunni areas of the Hill States is severe in summer and pleasant in winter with only a moderate variation between the day and night temperature. Snowfall was rare in the Shimla Hill States situated in lower hills. The climate in the upper hill valleys between Shimla and Sarahan is pleasant in summer and very cold in winter and snow is moderate. In Kinnaur the climate is temperate in summer and very cold in winter.

The forests of the Shimla Hill States were its most valuable assets as well as its most interesting and picturesque features.<sup>28</sup> The *Raja* of Bushahr state leased his forests to the British Government and in return he secured annual payment.

The people of the Shimla Hill states lived in villages and population was totally rural.<sup>29</sup> The population consists of *Brahmans*, *Thakurs*, *Rajputs*, *Kanets* etc. in the upper castes and *Kolis*, *Dagis*, *Chamars*, *Lohars*, *Turis*, etc. in the lower castes. The *Dagis* and *Kolis* were the principal menial tribes.<sup>30</sup>

As the population was rural, people were largely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandary for their subsistence and keep large herds of goats and sheep. In the lower Shimla Hills the Dun Valley in Nalagarh was an open and richly cultivated valley. Opium was made in these hill states which was the only cash crop.

27. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 387.

28. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Shimla Hill States*. Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911, p. 1.

29. *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XVII, Punjab, Part-II, Tables, Lahore 1933, p. 3.

30. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, p. 379.

## Chapter-II

# *Origin and Historical Survey of the Begār System*

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☞ A clear idea of the *begār* system is essential to understand the manner in which forced labour was taken from a subject or a tenant by the ruler of the state or a landlord. *Begār* is a persian word and in its broadest sense means the unpaid exploitation of labour.<sup>1</sup> It is well known that in the hills wheeled conveyances did not exist. The imports and exports of the country and other essential requirements of society were carried quite frequently on the back of camels and mules. There was also, a class of porters which earned its subsistence by this carrying trade for ordinary purposes, however, for the transport, for instance, of travellers' luggage, or for carrying unwieldy articles for public purposes, human labour alone was available. To meet this necessity a custom had grown up, that possessed the sanction of ancient times. All who cultivated the soil were bound to give, as a condition of tenure, a portion of their labour at the time of the need of state or government.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the *begār* system often entailed the carrying of loads and other obligations of the state in addition to land revenue. It was intimately related to land and was a part of land revenue.

It might also be appropriate here to mention the *beth* system as one that was very closely associated with *begār*. *Beth* was, to put it simply, a system of land tenure and the focal point in this system was *bēthū*. The *bēthū* occupied and tilled land which in fact belonged to the *Raja*. He cultivated a portion for his subsistence and the remaining portion he cultivated on behalf of the *raja* who received the profits. In addition he had some responsibilities for carrying loads.<sup>3</sup> The ruler naturally did not

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1. A Merriam Webster, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Massachutetts, 1968, p. 198.
  2. *Kangra District Settlement Report, 1855*, Lahore, 1862, p. 146.
  3. *Begār in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1939, B. No. 19, S.No. 489, p. 64.

receive land revenue from the land cultivated by the *bethus*. It was not only the *raja* who had *bethus*, but there were other *zamindars* also who had *bethus* who tilled their land and performed other services. Both *beth* and *begār* were related to land and land revenue.

It is difficult to fix a definite date for the development of *begār* system or to draw up a chronological chart for the different phases through which it passed. The basic assumption of *begār* seems to be that he who cultivates the land, also gives service to the land holder or the ruler in addition to land revenue.

The premodern state was basically dependent upon on land revenue. For this purpose it strictly regulated the system of ownership and cultivation of land. To put the political aspect of land control in the clearest possible focus, the land was life, the land was security, the land was wealth and prestige.

In the hills the rulers' control over land seems to have been even greater. In addition to the political power which the ruler had over the land, the *begār* system assured him of the fact that he could call upon his peasants to build up his defences and to help in the working of his land. This compulsory unpaid labour played an important role in the day to day conduct of the business of the state. The *begār* system was suited well to the conditions of the hill states when requirements of the *raja* and his court were moderate, the currency of money was limited and the resources of the people were slender.<sup>4</sup>

Each principality formed a separate and independent domain of the *raja*. According to Hutchison and Vogel the *raja* was regarded as the sole proprietor and fountain head of all rights in the soil. They have also suggested that all the subjects were his servants and hold their land under the obligation of military and other service, according to the condition of their tenure. The artisans and other non-agricultural residents in the villages who held garden plots which belonged to *raja*, were bound to the service of him only.<sup>5</sup> They were not the only class bound to service. The regular land holders were also liable to be pressed for the service of this kind, military or menial.

4. *Mandi State Gazetteer 1920*, Vol. XII-A, Lahore, 1920, p. 67.

5. L.R. Hutchison and J. Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States*, Vol. I, Reprint, Shimla, 1982, p. 67.

All those who were settled on the land of the *raja* were employed in three different forms of state service. Firstly, were the men of respectable families who paid revenue in cash, were employed as soldiers or attendants on state officials. Secondly, were those who paid revenue in cash and kind, were employed as soldiers or in carrying loads for the troops on a campaign. And thirdly, were those who in addition to paying revenue in cash and kind were required to furnish *begār* or forced labour in the capitals.<sup>6</sup>

According to the interpretation of British officials, the *rajas* were the sole owner of the land. They were often regarded as the *Ala-Malik*. They gave the best land to their kith and kin and their followers, known as *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. These *jagirdars* and *zamindars* who cultivated land themselves or get it cultivated through tenants were known as inferior or *Adna-Malik*<sup>7</sup>

*Begār* was prevalent throughout the hill areas between the rivers Yamuna and Sutlej. The land and its ownership was not the only factor for the evolution of *begār* system in the hills but the topography, local conditions and needs of the people were also responsible for its evolution. The villages were and are located high up in the slopes. The hill paths were narrow and dangerous. The hill tracks were and still are not fit for carrying of loads by mules and ponies. The only means of transport was human labour.<sup>8</sup> The rulers of the hill states felt the need, from time to time to build and repair palaces and forts which was essential to exercise control over their territory. For this purpose they felt the need of permanent labourer. To meet this they put the obligation on the peasantry to render free service to the state or landlords in lieu of land revenue or in addition to nominal revenue.<sup>9</sup> With the passage of time this forced labour became a permanent feature. Thus, it seems that the free service of various kinds to the ruler or landlord in lieu of land utilization came to be known as *beth* and *begār*.

The people by long imposition of *begār* gradually came to regard this obligation as one of the normal condition of existence. So long as it was kept within tolerable and legitimate bounds, they were content to

6. *Ibid*, p. 68.

7. *Keonthal State Settlement Report* 1901, Punjab Hill States Agency, No paging.

8. *Chamba State Gazetteer* 1904, Vol. XXII-A, Lahore, 1910, p. 271.

9. Mian Durga Singh, *Settlement and New Management of Jubbal State*, Lahore, 1907, p. 27.



render this duty. Certain classes were exempted from these services and the burden fell mainly on the strictly agricultural classes. The meanest and the most burdensome forced labour was to carry heavy loads.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Mughal rulers of Delhi did not penetrate into the Shimla Hills, the chiefs of these hills accepted their supremacy and paid tribute to them. In times of need, they sent porters for the transport of materials during their expeditions. These porters seems to be in the form of *begāris*. It appears that in 1635, Emperor Shah Jahan sent an expedition against Garhwal. He sent a *farman* to Raja Mandhata Prakash to Sirmaur to assist the Mughal army.<sup>11</sup> This assistance included porters which seems to be *begāris*. According to local tradition Jahanara Begum is believed to have come to Kumarsain for musk hunting in the Hattoo peak. The *rana* of Kumarsian is said to have provided *begāris* for carrying the *palanquin* and the bag and baggage of the princess.<sup>12</sup> This shows that at least in local consciousness the system of *begār* was taken as a service that the peasant had necessarily to render.

During the period of Mughal supremacy, Keonthal state paid to the authority in the hills 1100 rupees annually levied in the name of the king of Delhi by the *Rajas* of Kahlur, Sirmaur and Hindoor, according to the degree of power they respectively possessed, and it was further required to furnish to the state, to which it was tributary, a contingent of 650 fighting men and the same number of hill porters for the service of the Mughal empire, but generally employed for the purpose of individual aggrandizement.<sup>13</sup> The ruler of Baghat state also used to pay offerings of 1,000 rupees to the sovereign of Delhi through the *rajas* of Hindur, Kahlur or Sirmaur according to their temporary power and also used to furnish 300 fighting men and 300 hill porters.<sup>14</sup> The Baghat state also used to pay to the Mughals and until the decline of Delhi authority, he used to pay to the *Subedar* of Sarhind an annual presents of Rs. 750/-. Baghat was also bound to furnish on requisition 600 armed men and 600 hill porters for the service of the empire.<sup>15</sup>

10. Kangra District Settlement Report 1855, Lahore, 1862, p. 146.

11. Ranzor Singh Kanwar, *Tawarik-i-Riyasat Sirmaur*, Allahabad, 1912, pp 217-18.

12. Bhagwat Rai, *Baharae Kumarsian*, Delhi, 1930, p. 56.

13. Walter Hamilton, *Geographical, Statistical and Historical description of Hindostan and the adjacent countries*, Vol. II, Reprint, Delhi, 1971, 623

14. *Ibid* p. 624.

15. *Ibid* p. 623.

The Gorkhas from Nepal occupied Sirmaur in 1803. In the year 1805 they were invited by the ruler of Kahlur to march against the ruler of Kangra, Raja Sansar Chand. They remained in Kangra upto 1809 when they finally pushed back beyond the Sutlej. As soon as the Gorkhas returned to the east of the Sutlej in 1809, their commander Amar Singh Thapa turned his whole force against Hindur and occupied it. After this he moved to Arki, the capital of Baghal state and drove out the *Rana*. In the 1810 he turned his attention to the upper hill states and penetrated as far as Wangtoo in Bushahr state. Amar Singh Thapa made Rampur his capital and in 1813 he shifted to Arki in the Baghal state. During the occupation of hill states, the Gorkha took *begār* ruthlessly from the people, they liked to be served without paying any wage, which of course means a great oppression.<sup>16</sup>

The people of hill states were tired up of the harsh and tyrannical rule of the Gorkhas. They united themselves and took stand against them. The British Government came to their help and in 1815 the Gorkhas were compelled to leave the country.

On the conclusion of the Gorkha war in 1815, the area between the Yamuna and the Sutlej by virtue of conquest came under the sway of the East India Company. The British Government then decided to return the territories to their respective rulers, which the rulers of hill states accepted gladly. At the same time, however, while handing over the territories, the British granted *sanads* to the rulers.

Under these *sanads*, the hill chiefs were put under certain obligations in return for their territories. They were to allow free passage to British merchants and their goods. They had to furnish a certain number of *begāris* and also had to construct roads with the help of *begāris* in their respective territories.<sup>17</sup> The bigger states like Bushahr were bound to join the British army with their armed retainers and hill porters when called upon to do so at the time of war.

There were also, however, some states which did not have *begār* and therefore, when the British officers were on tour in these states they could not provide *begāris* to them to carry their luggage. Jubbal was one such state. In order to avoid future hardships and as a result of the

16. Udhab Singh Kanwar, *The Gorkha Conquest of Arki*, Lahore, 1903, p. 14-15

17. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sands relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. I. Calcutta, 1931, pp 70 110.

opposition on the part of the people, the British Government had to levy tribute on the states and pay for the *begāris*. The burden of *begār* mainly fell on the people of the lower strata of the society, the influential and people of higher castes were exempted from rendering it. But in the hill states, the rulers, *jagirdars* and *zamindars* continued to take *begār* from tenants unabatedly. Before 1884, *begār* was exacted ruthlessly and practically without any limit. As a result of the persuance of British Government, the evil practice of *begār* was abolished in Jubbal state in 1886.<sup>18</sup>

After the expulsion of the Gorkhas from the hill states, the British Government retained Kotkhai, Kotgarh, Shimla and Bharoli as British posts for military purposes. They discontinued *begār* except for the repair of roads and bridges. Lt. Col. E.G. Wace who had conducted the first regular settlement of Shimla district mentioned that "All the residents will help in the repairs of roads, especially as government has not assessed on the tracts any road cess. As to the labour (*begār*) required for the post and government camps, the residents are liable to furnish that also. The Deputy Commissioner can excuse individual from petty demands for the labour, but in all works everyone will help, whether ordinary exempted or not. By great works are intended, a government or military camp, or the building of a large bridge or any other great work."<sup>19</sup>

Such were the main features of the ancient system, which if honestly worked, was not ill adopted to the needs of the country and the circumstances of the people. Under a strong ruler the burdens were equitably distributed and the principles underlying their imposition were in harmony with the people's conception of their duties. The trouble was that there were a few strong rulers. Power was gradually usurped by the *Wazirs* until at length they became the judicial executive and revenue administrators of the state. As collectors of the numerous imposts, they took more for themselves than for the state.<sup>20</sup> Thus it seems that the *begār* system became more oppressive with the passage of time. As the people became conscious of this evil practice, they resisted and complained to the authorities against it.

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18. *Jubbal State Gazetteer*, Simla Hill States 1910, Lahore, 1911, p. 25.

19. E.G. Wace, *Final Report on the First Regular Settlement of Simla District*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 48.

20. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bhshahr state 1914*, p. 13.

## Chapter-III

### *Nature and Kinds of Begār*

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By means of the system of *begār* or unpaid forced labour, the theory of partnership in all assets was logically extended to the physical powers of the people. The *begār* system was more or less in the hills. Originally it was a personal obligation, but later on was definitely associated with the possession of land. The obligation of *begār* was part and parcel of the revenue system. It represented the ruler's claim to personal service.<sup>1</sup> The ruler had right to a share in all the assets of the people. This was applied to such an extent that man's physical strength was considered to belong as much to the *raja* as to their owner. It was obligatory to every household to supply an able-bodied man to labour for the state. More than one man from each household could hardly be demanded without the system of agriculture coming to an end. As it was a burden felt so severely that large households and joint families were encouraged by putting a veto on partition.<sup>2</sup>

The *begār* system suited well to the contemporary agricultural society where financial condition of the people was not sound and opportunities of the people to earn cash wages from outside labour were not adequate. Due to economic unsoundness, the ruler could not realised revenue and other miscellaneous dues in cash, which was essential for his own maintenance and smooth working of the administration. It was due to this reason that the ruler had to levy nominal revenue in cash and rest in the form of labour in lieu of cash from his subjects. Human labour was the only alternative to carry on administration and therefore become popular. The *begār* or forced labour was the heaviest and most important of the miscellaneous dues which the agricultural population had to provide. Without it the state's customary ceremonies, i.e., marriage, funerals, etc. could not be performed.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Mandi State Gazetteer 1920*, Vol. XII-A, Lahore, 1920, p 65.

2. *Assessment report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr state 1914*, p. 13.

3. *Keonthal State Settlement Report, Simla district, 1914*, p. 45. 26



By the beginning of the 19th century, the practice of *begār* was universal in India with some exceptions where British *Thanas* of police had been established. The British Government gave official recognition to this arbitrary practice.<sup>4</sup> After the Gorkha war, the British Government availed the facilities of *begār* for their individual officials and troops while passing through the Hill States.

While defining *begār*, S.E. Stokes has mentioned, "begār was the system by which the transportation of each state was carried on. It was not from stage to stage as at present, but from one village to the next."<sup>5</sup> The state materials and the luggage of the officials were carried from one village to another until they reached their destination. Though unpaid, this system imposed little hardship, not only because there was not much to carry, but because only the *begār* of the state and its officials was carried on.<sup>6</sup>

Under the British Government, the burden of the *begār* system increased in the Shimla Hill States with the completion of Shimla-Tibet road and the growth of Shimla as a hill station. The officials and non-officials began to go for trips and sport in the interior of the hill states. They were permitted to make use of *begār* of hillmen on the condition of payment from the *pargana* situated in the vicinity because these hillmen were required to bring their own provisions and live at their own cost in the *dak* banglows. These men were provided by the *mate* (servants) kept in the *dak* banglows. The Englishmen settled in the hills were also given the same privilege. The visiting official paid for everything else he received at the *dak* banglow but the *mate* did not pay it for the poor hillman for his service.<sup>7</sup> The *begār* system had also been prevailed in the U.P. Hills on the same basis as it was in the Shimla Hill States due to their similar locations.<sup>8</sup>

There were various kinds of *begār* which were prevalent in the Shimla Hill States. They can be listed as below:

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4. Mian Bashir Ahmed Farooqi, *British Relations with the Cis-Sutlej States, 1809-1823*, Punjab Government Publication, 1941, p. 50.
  5. S.E. Stokes, *National Self-Realisation*, Madras, 1921, p. 131.
  6. *Ibid.* p. 131.
  7. S.E. Stokes, *National Self-Realisation*, Reprint Delhi, 1975, p. 47.
  8. Dr. Ajay Singh Rawat, *Garhwal Himalayas-A Historical Survey*, Delhi, 1983, p. 166 also prevalent in the states of Kangra, Chamba and Mandi on same basis.

### 1. *Athwara Begār*

*Athwara* was personal *begār* to the ruler. It was the system under which compulsory unpaid labour could be taken from any person for any purpose, and it was demanded by the state and given without question by the people. It included service given at the *darbar* of the chief by men of various *parganas* of the state in rotation.

Usually it was used for supplying firewood to the *darbar* for the ruler and his family and grass for their cattle and horses. It was also used for the cultivation of the ruler's *basa* (Khudkasht) lands. It was also used by state officials and *Ahlkars* in whose favour the use of a certain number of *athwara begāris* had been sanctioned, for their private supply of grass and firewood.<sup>9</sup> This compulsory unpaid labour was taken from each house or holding for certain number of days in the year. The period of *begār* differed from state to state. The revenue settlement of the hill states were done between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. The settlement in case of Theog, took place in 1932 while that of Dhadi took place in 1884. Those of the other states took place at the intermediate dates.<sup>10</sup> Previous to these settlements *begār* especially *athwara* was taken ruthlessly and practically without limit.

✓ H.W. Emerson, the settlement officer, while giving his note on the *athwara* labour in 1914, has mentioned the principal wages in which it had been employed upto that time, were.<sup>11</sup>

- (a) At the stages on the Hindustan-Tibet road and elsewhere.
- (b) For the collection of grass and fuel at the capital.
- (c) By way of allowance to state servants.
- (d) For the provision of grass, fuel and water to the *raja's* establishment.
- (e) On public works.
- (f) In bringing state loads.

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9. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, Sr. No. 611, p. 99

10. *Balson State Settlement Report and Land Settlement in the Punjab Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1942, B.No. 17, S. No. 469, p. 95.

11. H.W. Emerson, Note on Reduction of Atharu Labour, appended to the Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State 1914, para-2.

// *Brahmans*, superior *Rajputs*, shopkeepers, who had settled in the state, state and village officials and certain temple servants had been exempted from rendering this service. The tenants of *jagirdars*, *zamindars* or temple, if they owned no land of their own, were also exempted. In addition, individuals or families had been granted exemption, either in return for the payment of *nazrana* or as a reward for conspicuous services rendered to the state.<sup>12</sup> Widows, minors, the aged and infirm had either totally exempted or allowed to pay compensation according to their means. But there are instance that even widows and minors were forced to render this kind of *begār* and non-compliance resulted in heavy fines.<sup>13</sup>

This was the most irksome and pernicious kind of *begār* and tended itself to obvious abuses and was undoubtedly a great burden on the people. It interferred seriously with a man working in his fields. When he had to go for *athwara begār* he had to leave all his own work unattended. The system was so hard that the *zamindars* of the *parganas* of Rawin and Punder of Keonthal state being at distance of 57 and 42 miles, respectively, from Junga, the capital of the state, supplied the *darbar* firewood, which was used daily by the *raja* and his household.<sup>14</sup> At Junga 376 *begāris* had to be on duty daily at the *darbar* without wages and food. At Koti 40 men had to be in attendance daily. At Kuthar, a small state, 35 *begāris* had to be present at the palace. It was the most burdensome in Bushahr state where it was taken for six months in the year. In the state, in addition to the *raja*, the *wazir*, *jagirdar*, *maufidar* and *thakurs* had been making use of *athwara begār* for cultivating their lands, cooking their food, fetching water, etc.<sup>15</sup> In Kunihar, the oppressive *athwara begār* was taken at the rate of 4 months per year per house. In Beja any *zamindar* who defaulted on his *athwara* was evicted from the land. In Dhami it was taken for 10 days per month to plough the ruler's lands. The *zamindars* used their ploughs and bullocks.<sup>16</sup>

12. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr state 1914*, p. 18-19.

13. *Ghund State Settlement Report*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1946, B.No.1, Sr. No. 5, p.6.

14. *Keonthal state Settlement Report, Simla district*, 1914, p. 45.

15. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B. No. 26, Sr. No. 611, pp. 99-100.

16. *Ibid* p. 86.

supply milk free of charge for the use of the camp. People had to be present at the *dak* banglow to serve the officials. A contemporary writer has mentioned that "when the Deputy Commissioner or political officer goes on tour, everyone with them expects to be treated as a Deputy Commissioner."<sup>23</sup>

### 6. *Begār for State guests*

When any big chief visited the state as a guest he was provided with *begār* labour for carrying his luggage and other requirements. The people of the *pargana* through which he passed had to make every arrangement for his tour and camp. As such instances were rare they did not fall as a great burden on the people. The labour was paid for in Jubbal, Baghal, Baghat, Mehlog, Kuthar, Beja, Tharoch and Koti. It could, however, be at times a great burden if this kind of labour was asked for at a time when agricultural operations required the cultivators to work on their own fields.

### 7. *Gaonsar Begār*

It consisted in villagers carrying the bundles etc. of tehsil, police and other state and village officials from village to village on their tours. This system was not generally heavy on the people. It had the sanction of immemorial custom and in a community where money was scarce and time of little moment was probably preferable to any additional money payment. This *begār* was taken everywhere in India.<sup>24</sup>

This kind of *begār* was of three types.<sup>25</sup> The residents of the village had to arrange for the carriage of the state and government *dak* to the next village, they had to repair village roads when called upon to do so, and they had to supply unpaid coolies for the purpose of transport of certain state officials. The first two of three burden were not heavy, although the requirement of *dak* tended to increase, the labour on village roads, decreased steadily as the state and forest departments extended the obligation under their control maintenance. But in

23. S.E. Stokes, *National Self-Realisation*, Madras, 1921, pp. 138-39.

24. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B. No. 26, S. No. 611, p. 192.

25. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State 1914*, pp 20-21.

Bushahr state, *patwaris* and *chaprasis* were entitled for this *begār* and other officials were given travelling allowance.<sup>26</sup>

### 8. Road Begār

It was a form of *gaonsar begār* and consisted in repair of roads and bridle tracks done by *begāris* in their respective territories. It was also equitable on all the people. It was not used for the construction of new roads. This was undoubtedly an important *begār*. It was the only one conducive to the welfare of the state and was at least objectionable from the agricultural point of view, as repair was carried out at times when field work was finished. It was not subjected to much abuse except where some rulers like the ruler of Dhami, acted contrary to the *wajib-ul-arz* and used *begār* to build a new road. This was the reason for the rebellion of 1937.<sup>27</sup> It was a part of land revenue because road cess had never been included in it at the time of assessment.

In Bushahr there came complaint about road *begār* because some villages had large thorough roads to maintain. The burden of road *begār* was recognised and commuted in Nalagarh, and totally abolished in Jubbal, Baghat and Kuthar.<sup>28</sup> But later on state maintained main thorough roads, state paths, etc. Village footpaths were left to the discretion of villagers.

### 9. Shikar Begār

It consisted in furnishing *begār* to high officials or friends of the ruler at beating jungles for game. But this kind of *begār* was disapproved by settlement officer. It was made compulsory that if the ruler engaged beater for his friends he had to pay for them. On occasion when the Viceroy went out for shooting, he distributed *bakshish* to the beaters which was equivalent to then daily wage.<sup>29</sup>

### 10. Mule Begār

Some shopkeepers and others keep mules in many states for trade

26. *Ibid* p. 20.

27. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, S.No. 611, p. 105.

28. *Ibid* p. 102.

29. *Abid* p. 102.



purposes. They supplied mules to the state according to the requirements. In Keonthal state they had to provide mules for 15 days in the year. A commutation fee was fixed for mule *begār* at Rs. 5/- per mule annually from shopkeepers and 2/8/0 (two rupees and eight annas) from the *zamindars*.<sup>30</sup>

### 11. Religious Begār

This kind of *begār* has not been mentioned anywhere in the documents regarding *begār* except at one place, when in 1940, the Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, Shimla has mentioned five kinds of *begār* in his note to Secretary to the Resident of the Punjab States, of which religious *begār* was one.<sup>31</sup>

The religious *begār* consisted in labour in connection with the ceremonies and celebrations of festivals of the local dieties. Such ceremonies were part of religion of the people and therefore, the people had to contribute on such occasion. There is an instance of such an occasion in Bushahr state when the *dyapon* ceremony or *jag* was celebrated on a very large scale at the temple of Bhima Kali at Sarahan in 1904.<sup>32</sup> The funds for the celebration were collected from the people of the state in kind and cash. Though people were financially unsound yet they had to pay Rs. 4/- per holding under the compulsion from the ruler.

Moreover, it was the custom for all to present at the *darbar* and present tribute, according to their means, to the *raja* and sometimes to other members of his family.

Thus, presentation on such religious occasion was obligatory to the people of the state and it seems to be a kind of *begār*. People had the compulsion from the ruler on one hand and fear of the diety on the other.

This kind of service still exists in the villages of upper Shimla region in one form or the other where people of lower caste have to carry the drums of the local dieties without any remuneration when the

30. *First Regular Settlement of Koti State 1916*, p. 118.

31. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1939, B.No. 19, S.No. 489, p. 65.

32. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State 1914*, p. 21.

dieties are on tour in the villages. These people had no choice because of the compulsion from the society.

The period of above mentioned kinds of *begar* differed from state to state due to their customs and conditions. Upto the beginning of 20th century, in the small states, such as Madhan, Tharoch, Shangri and Ghund, *begār* was exacted according to the requirements of the rulers and was unlimited.

There is also an instance of *begār* being imposed in terms of land revenue, that is to say, a man who paid more land revenue than his neighbourer had to furnish *begār* for longer period.<sup>33</sup>

There is also an instance that those who render *begār* service to the *jagirdars* had not to work for the state and vice-versa.<sup>34</sup>

In Koti and Shangri states *begāris* also served as policemen. They lived in their own homes, not in the *thanas*, but were supposed to be ready when they were required.<sup>35</sup>

In this way the system of *begār* was universal in the Shimla Hill States and each kind of *begār* played a separate part in the state economy. But as soon as the cash economy of hill people began to develop, people found this unpaid labour oppressive and all kinds of *begār* began to be commuted into cash.

## Section B

### *Beth System*

*Beth* was an obligation to render personal service in return for certain cultivating rights. Formally, serfs were transferred like cattie from one owner to another. These serf-like people were locally known as *bethus*.<sup>36</sup>

The *bethu* received from his master, food two or three times a day, a suit of clothes once in the year, a house to live in and a few *bighas* of

33. *Mahlog State Gazetteer, Simla Hill States 1910, Vol. VII, Lahore, 1911, p. 8.*

34. *Bushahr State Gazetteer, Simla Hill States 1910, Vol. VIII, Lahore, 1911 p. 12.*

35. *Koti State Gazetteer, Simla Hill States 1910, Lahore, 1911, p. 12*

36. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State 1914, p. 48.*

land to cultivate for his own profits. In return, they did the greater part of the field work and performed menial services for their master. The employer defrayed the expences of their domestic ceremonies. The lower classes such as *Kolis*, *Rehrs* etc. who stood low in the social ladder and did this kind of *beth* service.<sup>37</sup> Thus, *bethus* rendered service as a part of their being given right to cultivate the land of their masters and it may regarded as one of the worst forms of *begār*.

The *bethus* consisted of the following three classes:

(1) It consisted of those *bethus* who were directly under the state and worked in the *basa* land which included all the processes of cultivation of *basa* land and produce of which was given to the ruler or state. The *bethus* employed by the *jagirdars* also fall under this class.<sup>38</sup>

(2) *Bethus* employed by the *zamindars*:

The *bethus* of this kind worked in the field of the *zamindars*. They were in better place then those employed by the state, because the latter were in closer daily contact with their masters whereas the former had indirect contact with their master, through minor state servants.

(3) Indebted *Bethus*:

The third kind of *bethus* were indebted *bethus* who had taken loans from their masters and in return they agreed to work or supply goods in lieu of interest and the principal amount was never liquidated.<sup>39</sup>

*Bethus* descended from father to son by a right of inheritance so long as they cultivated well and rendered services to their master. Thus, *bethus* of all kinds were hardpressed and treated like beasts by their masters. They were sent for collection and carriage of wood and grass to the *darbar* as well as other miscellaneous duties by their masters.

37. *Simla District Gazetteer 1888-89*, Calcutta, 1889, p. 48

38. *Reforms-Beth and Begar*, Punjab Hill States Agency, Vol. I, 1946, B.No. 21, Sr. No. 532, p. 75.

39. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, Sr. No. 611, p. 136.



## *Chapter-IV*

# *Social and Economic Implications of Begār System*

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In early times *begār* was an important aspect of the social and economic life of hill people. It was an integral part of the hill economy and the social structure of the area. It was closely connected with land, labour and living. The *begār* system, it appears was well suited to the needs and conditions of the hill states and the circumstances of an agricultural society with low productivity and an underdeveloped cash economy, where cash currency was limited and the resources of the people were inadequate. It became economically and socially unsound as soon as the other means of assignments were possible and opportunities of the people to earn cash from outside labour was adequate.

Under the system as it obtained with the passage of time, the rich and the strong escaped, the poor and the weak had to bear a double burden. Between different classes and between members of the same class, the burdens were not equitably distributed which resulted in the gross unequities and entirely robbed the system of its original merits. To some extent the lack of uniformity was deliberate, for it was the policy of the rulers of the hill states to take light *begār* and a heavy cash or revenue in kind where the soil was fertile and the converse where the surplus produce was small, but even when allowance was made for this, the distribution was entirely unfair. The popular estimate of the system has been well summed up in the following two proverbs:

“The sky loses its brightness when overcast with clouds, water its purity when covered with slime, a pretty wife her charm at her parents’ home and a man his manliness in the *Raja’s begār* service “and a *Chamar* even at the point of death dreams of *begār*”<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Mandi State Gazetteer 1920*, Vol. XII-A, Lahore, 1920, p.67.

*Brahmans*, some certain classes of *Rajputs*, state and village officials, influentials and respectable men of lower grade were exempted from *begār*. The rich *bania* families secured commutation of *begār* into cash. The burden fell mainly on the people of the lower classes and low caste people such as *Koli*, *Chamar*, *Rehr*, *Bahri*, *Lohar*, etc. Soldiers of Indian army who were subjects of their hill states were exempted from *begār* in 1840. But those who were exempted had to render some petty and occasional kinds of *begār*. The cases on which the exemption from *begār* had been granted were not numerous. In Bushahr state out of 18,867 holdings *begār* was exempted on 7,710 holdings, in Nalagarh out of 16,920 holdings exemption was granted only to 272 holdings.<sup>2</sup>

There seems no such provision in the Simla Hill states as that prevailed in the Mandi state that those classes who were exempted from *begār*, particularly that of fixed days in the year, had to perform other services instead, such as, the *Rajputs* were expected to give military service. *Brahmans* were expected to assist the state festival, to work in the ruler's kitchen on special occasions and always pray for the long life and prosperity of their chief, and shopkeepers and traders had to help with the distribution of supplies and preparation of accounts on occasion of state entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

The artisans-gold and silver smiths, iron workers, carpenters, etc. - were all liable for *begār* if they possessed land, although they usually supplied substitutes. The artisans usually made articles for the chief during their *begār* period. Describing the lot of *begāris*, a contemporary writer who lived amongst the hill people wrote, "the growth of Simla and the opening of the interior has reduced the hillman to the position of a beast of burden and a helot. His rights as a free man are denied, his work is seriously interfered with, and the relation in which he stands to those who force him to serve is demoralising in the extreme. He is often cursed and even beaten."<sup>4</sup> The *jagirdar* had the same rights to levy *begār* in their *jagirs* as the state had outside.

2. *Begar in Simla Hill states*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No.-26, S.No.-611, p. 112.

3. *Mandi State Gazetteer 1920*, Vol. XII-A, Lahore, 1920, p. 66

4. S.E. Stokes, *National Self-Realisation*, Reprint, New-Delhi, 1975, p. 48.

The *beth* system, a part of *begār*, was a more oppressive one and it affected the people from the lower castes. The *bethu* was confined to serve only to his master and to work at a particular place of the choice of his master. Normally, the master forced his *bethu* to construct a thatched hut in the agricultural fields. Such confined *bethus* were virtually cut off from the rest of the world for all practical purposes. Hence, his life was almost confined within a specified world. As a result his aspirations and beliefs were also likely to have been restricted.

The burden of *begār* was so heavy that one consequence was the encouragement given to the continuation of large joint families. The states had always discouraged the partition of families in its own interest. This ensured that a man could be easily available for *begār*, when it was his turn to render service. The old system by which the state demanded the whole time services of one man from every household for a fixed period in the year, further necessitated the encouragement of large joint families. In some areas, therefore, a veto was placed on the partition of all family property.<sup>5</sup>

Brothers were compelled to live together and the independent character of hill woman constrained them to have a wife in common, for the sake of their domestic peace, since the hill woman was not ready to tolerate a rival in her house.<sup>6</sup> Thus, another implication of *begār* system was that it became the one of the causes for the rise of polyandry. It enabled a family of brothers to get the full benefits of several sources of livelihood and protect the wife in the dangerous country when the husband was away. Polyandry was directly encouraged by the state through penalties exacted on partition.<sup>7</sup>

The *begār* system was also the cause of corruption such as bribe in the society. In families where there was only adult male, if he did not want to render *begār* on his turn, he could get exemption by bribing the *patwari* or *lamberdar*.<sup>8</sup>

One implication of the *begār* system was that it fostered the habits

5. *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State, 1914*, p. 13.

6. *Ibid* p.28-29.

7. *Bushahr State Gazetteer*, Simla Hill States 1910, Lahore, 1911, p. 16.

8. *Emerson's Note on Reduction of Atharu Labour*, appended to the *Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bhushar State, 1914*, para-1.

of idleness. The object of the *begāri* was to do as little as possible because he had to receive nothing for the work and one could not blame him for his work. Thus, the state got nothing and apart from the economic wastage, the effects were demoralising to all concerned.<sup>9</sup>

The *bethu*, from the point of view of social contacts was cut off from the outside world due to his slave-like condition. Due to the age old practice of *beth* and consequently the loss of ambition, he and his family members were made to believe that there is nothing wrong, it was due to their bad luck and they could not own land, and they could not do anything against it. Besides this, the philosophy of '*Karma*' was backed by religious percepts and was accepted by both rich and poor, high and low castes. None could challenge the system because of support of religion and society.

The appalling poverty and joylessness of their life under such conditions can not be easily pictured. They were treated as menials. A contemporary writer had described the life of such field workers as: - "His hut is seldom rethatched, and affords little shelter from cold and rain, his wife is clothed in rags, his little children go without clothes. Of furnitures he had none, and old blanket is quite a luxury in the cold weather, and if his children can tend cattle, or his wife can do some work to eke out his income, he considers himself happy. It is literally a fact, and not a figure on speech, generally suffer from insufficient food from years' end to years' end".<sup>10</sup>

The social contacts of the *bethu* were confined to a shorter distance because the nature of his work did not permit him to go far off places. Normally, his master could not even allow him to leave his place of work. He might be permitted such movements only if it was unavoidable and did not affect his work adversely. Moreover, the *bethu* was economically very poor and had to depend on his master. So he could not afford to go to far off place without the permission of his master. In the social hierarchy, the *bethus* were treated as the lowest. Economically, they were the poorest, so they were exposed to both social oppression and economic exploitation.

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9. *Ibid* para-1.

10. R.C. Majumdar, (ed) *The History and Culture of Indian People*, Vol. IX, Bombay, 1963, p. 1150.

As the *bethus* were poor, they were put in difficulties everyday. They were helpless during their entire human life. In a way they were discontented with their own life, but carried its burden without any complaint, as they were made to believe that this is a creation of divinity. Hence there was no wonder if they believed in their fate which determined their outlook towards life, their problems, ill health, troubles, torture from master, etc. It was perhaps in those pitiable circumstances that they resorted to their faith in God and in supernatural powers.

Historically, people of the lower castes were deprived of economic power as well as social status. They did not possess any economic power or assets in the form of agricultural lands. If the *bethus* had been permitted to possess land, there would have been the problem for big *zamindars* and landlords to provide *begāris* for the ruler and cultivate their own land and other work.

With the completion of the Shimla-Tibet road and the growth of Shimla town, the burden of *begār* increased on hill people. For the carriage of materials to construct rest houses in the far interior, the forced labour of hill men along the road was requisitioned.<sup>11</sup> It was extracted without any reference to the exigencies of the farmer's own life and the bulk of the burden fell on him at times when it was imperative for him to be in his fields. Thus, it created discontentment amongst the people against this oppressive system of *begār*.

Since from the establishment of British supremacy over the hill states in 1815 upto the end of 19th century there seems to have occurred no agitation against the *begār* system. When the people became financially sound, compared to their previous position, they became conscious of their oppression. They started to make complaints against this oppression to their respective settlement officers and requested that cash be levied in place of personal *begār*. When their requests did not obtain any fruitful results, they started present petitions to the authorities. As a result of continued oppression of *athwara begār* on the part of the ruler and other officials, rebellion broke out in many hill states, such as in Kuthar in 1895, Keonthal in 1901, Theog in 1910-28, Khaneti in 1906, Kumarsain in 1920 and Dhami in 1937.<sup>12</sup>

11. S.E. Stokes, *National Self Realisation*, Reprint, Delhi, 1975, p-48.

12. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No.26, S.No. 611, p. 100.



In Keonthal state people of four northern *parganas*, that is Matiana, Shilli, Rajona and Chandra revolted in April 1893, against the oppressive system of *athwara* and stopped providing *begār*. But it was settled according to the demands of the people. In 1910, the *Kanets* and *Kolis* of the state presented a petition to the settlement officer at Junga against *athwara*, requesting the abolition of *athwara* at Junga and the fixation of cash in lieu thereof.<sup>13</sup>

Although all hill men felt that something must be done against the misuse of forced labour at once, but no community was in position to move. It was taken up by S.E. Stokes, who was a missionary in India and settled in Kotgarh, formed a sort of vigilance committee and made a representation for the redressal of the grievances of the *begāris*<sup>14</sup> and achieved some success.

The people began to look upon *begār* and other levies as unjust, something which they had been tolerating for centuries, indicated the growth of political consciousness among them. *Begār* had for very long influenced their attitudes and beliefs. It had engendered in the people a feeling of awe and reverence to the rulers, officials and *jagirdars*. The *beth* which was the worst part of *begār*, had inculcated in the people of low caste a feeling of hatred and awe both to rulers as well as to the people of higher castes. It stamped their personality with inferiority. The abolition of such impositions came to be regarded by the people sufficient reason for launching agitations against the rulers of the hill states. The *begār* system was one of the potent causes for the organisation of *Praja Mandals* in the Shimla Hill states.<sup>15</sup> The *Praja Mandals* were organised for the attainment of democratic rights for the people in most of the hill states, in some places openly and in some secretly. The British Indian Government began to receive complaints of people against *begār* through *Praja Mandals* after their organisation.<sup>16</sup> To rouse people it undertook to organise public meetings at the different places in various Shimla Hill States, collect data about injustices and cruelties perpetrated on hill people, represent their case before the

13. *Keonthal State Settlement Report 1914*, p.108.

14. S.E. Stokes, *National Self Realisation*, Reprint, Delhi 1975, p. 49.

15. Y.S. Parmar, *Polyandry in the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1975, p. 179.

16. *Reform Beth and Begar*, Punjab Hill States Agency, Vol-I, 1946, p. 174.



political agent and the ruler through deputations and memoranda and encourage people to refuse to pay unjust taxes and perform *begār*.

// As a result of the growth of political consciousness and agitations against the social evils, British Indian Government had to form a 'Model Policy' on *begār* and *beth* by introducing reforms in this system, in August, 1943. After the formal announcement of this policy unpaid forced labour was prohibited in the Shimla Hill States. If the people found any injustice against them by the ruler, they presented petitions to British authority against it. The *bethus* of Theog, Shillag *pargana* of Chebisi of Kumarsain and Madhan states presented petitions to the political agent of the Shimla Hill States, against their respective rulers who were refusing to grant certain rights to them as sanctioned in the 'Model Policy'.<sup>17</sup> In Garhwal also, the people had already started an agitation and protest against the burden of *begār* system in 1921.<sup>18</sup>

Thus poverty, educational backwardness, lack of means of communication and transport, and an authoritarian social structure delayed the growth of consciousness amongst the hill people against their unjust oppression, however, these factors could not prevent its growth for ever.

## Section b

### *Economic Implications of Begār System*

The social and cultural factors and mores also influence the economic behaviour of the people. Among the fundamental characteristics of economic behaviour found throughout the world are the use of land, labour and money.

The *begār* system was an important and integral part of the economic system of the hill states. The whole economic life of the hills and revenue of the hill states seems to be depended on this system. It affected adversely the small peasants. The *zamindars* were not affected so adversely because they generally sent their *bethu* and other substitutes instead. It fell heavily on the poor people. When it was

17. *Begar in Punjab Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1944, B.No. 17, S.No. 451, p. 221

18. Dr. Ajay Singh Rawat, *Garhwal Himalayas-A Historical Survey*, Delhi, 1983, p. 168.

imperitive for them to work in their own fields during the crop seasons, they had to go for rendering *begār*. This resulted in a heavy personal economic lose to the people who were forced to render *begār*.

When people had no opportunities to earn money from outside labour, the *begār* system suited well because they had a lot of time to work as *begāri*. But as soon as the opportunities to earn money from outside labour increased it created for them a great financial loss. With the rise in the rates paid for casual labour, a month spent without payment means a considerable loss, which was often more than the amount of the monthly earnings. It interferred seriously with a man taking quasi-permanent labour. Thus, in a household containing two able bodied men, one would usually go on to some forest work in Bushahr and Garhwal. But as soon as the second brother was called upon to do his period of *athwara begār*, the first had to come home and he could rarely afford to go to the forest work.<sup>19</sup>

In families where there was only one adult male the hardship was felt more severely. Emerson has mentioned such hardship caused by this system, "He may have a wife and several small children, and the wife may be about to give birth to another child when the man's turn comes to give services. He will either have to go or purchase exemption by bribing the *patwari* or *lambardar*".<sup>20</sup> In case a man failed to render *begār* on his turn, he had to pay a heavy fine for default. Thus, the *begār* system seems inevitably the cause of much corruption.

In the real terms the state did not get anything like a month's work from each contributor because the object of the *begāri* was to do as little as possible since he did not receive any wage for his work. The mere fact that there were officials led many of them to make extravagant demands from the peasantry. Emerson has quoted an example of a Koli clerk in a government department. "He applied for the use of a Kanet *atharu* to wait on him. The request was of course refused, but the point of view was typical".<sup>21</sup> Though the state gained despite the low standard of work from the people on the other hand, the loss to the people was relatively far more than the gains to the state.

19. Emerson's Note on Reduction of Atharu Labour, appended to the Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State 1914, para-1.

20. *Ibid*, para-1.

21. *Ibid* para-1

There is also an instance that the *begāris* or *bethus* were given by the state to a *jagirdar* in lieu of sum cash amount of Rs. 50/- for his lifetime.<sup>22</sup> This shows the pitiable conditions of *bethus* and *begāris*, because the *jagirdar* used to extract the maximum labour from them, because he had to return them to the ruler after his death. Thus, the poor *begāris* and *bethus* had to suffer much under such circumstances.

Under the *beth* system, the *bethus* were badly downtrodden. The land given to them by their landlord besides being small were also less fertile. The *bethus* were very poor and lived from hand to mouth. Even their family members had to work in the fields of their master, particularly during the busy harvesting and sowing season. Therefore, for all practical purposes they were agricultural labourers and worked in the fields of their master during the peak season and worked in their own fields during the lean season. Thus, the *bethus* had to bear a great loss.<sup>23</sup>

Economically, the *bethus* were very important. They were engaged in the most important economic service by providing all the necessary labour to till the land. The land of the big *zamindars* and the *basa* land was cultivated by them. The *zamindars* and the rulers depended upon them for cultivation because there was no other labouring class which could be engaged to do this work.

The master used to bear the expenses of their domestic ceremonies. He treated the advances made to them as loans and agreement was taken from the debtor by which he bounded himself and his descendents to labour for the creditor until the debt was paid in full. Generally the debt could never be liquidated. No interest was charged, but neither was any credit given for the work done, this was regarded as compensated by the customary payments.<sup>24</sup> The indebtedness was incurred on account of necessary functions like marriages or disease or for consumption.

But the money lenders-cum-landlords seems to have also played a paternalistic role in the scarcity affected economy, in the sense that they met the basic demands of the *bethus* during periods of acute

22. Sent to Chief Minister Keonthal State Group. "Ghund Jagirdars", Punjab Hill States Agency, 1909, B.No. 1, S.No. 6, p. 19.

23. Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State. 1914, p. 38.

24. Ibid, p. 38.

shortages. It must be remembered that the system revolved around the vicious circle of poverty, inequality and exploitation.

When the opportunities to earn money from outside labour were adequate, people began to realise the loss caused by the *begār* system and started to resent it and desired its commutation into cash because they could earn more money from outside means than its cash commutation. As a result of the resentment of the people, the British Government had to make enquiries from the *darbars* of hill states for its commutation into cash in the beginning of the 4th decade of 20th century. The enquiries were compiled which showed the existing *begār* cesses as well as those that were proposed and the financial results compared with the *darbars*' estimate of the cost of commuting the various remaining *begār*.<sup>25</sup>

On the basis of these enquiries a statement was prepared which showed that except for the states of Bushahr, Mehlog, Koti, Madhan, Ghund, Ratesh and Dhadi other states profitted by the commutation into cash of various forms of *begār*.<sup>26</sup> Referring to Bushahr state it was seen that the land revenue of the holding on which *begār* was taken was Rs. 69,112/- and *athwara* was commuted at the rate of 12% of the revenue which amounted to Rs. 8,733/-. But the ruler estimated Rs. 28,000/- as the expenditure to be incurred on the total commutation into cash of *athwara begār*. This was presumably on account of charges for fetching grass and wood for the *raja*'s establishment at Rampur and Sarahan, and for the town of Rampur.<sup>27</sup> The estimate seems excessive as Mr. Emerson has observed in his note that the *begar* system was wasteful and *begaris* do as little work as possible.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it was observed that with care and supervision, the work could undoubtedly be done by much smaller number of paid labourers. It was presumed that there seems no reason why the sum of Rs. 8,733/- which was realised, should not cover all necessary coolie charges. As regards road *begār* which was at the rate of 7% of the land revenue of holdings on which *begār* was taken the sum

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25. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, S.No. 611, p. 106.

26. *Ibid.* p. 111.

27. *Ibid.* p. 106.

28. *Emerson's Note on Atharu labour appended to the Assessment Report to Rohru Tehsil of the Bushar State*, para-I.



amounted to Rs. 5,193/- and the state estimated Rs. 6,000/- in the total commutation of road *begār*. Including road cess, the total cesses amounted 45% of the land revenue, an average addition of sum annas -/1/5 per bigha bringing it up from an average of Rs. -/3/5 (in Rampur and Rohru) to As. -/4/10 per bigha. The total amount of *athwara* cess and road cess was Rs. 13,916/- but the state estimated the expense involved in it was Rs. 34000/- and showed a deficit of Rs. 20,094/-<sup>29</sup>

At that time Nalagarh had no *athwara* and road *begār* and land revenue of holding on which *begār* was taken was Rs. 1,24,857/-. *Athwara* was commuted into cash at the rate of 11% which amounted Rs. 13,744/- and road *begār* was commuted at the rate of 7% in the *pahar* (hill region) and 3% in *des* (in plain) which amounted Rs. 5,940/-. The total amount of both kinds of commutation was Rs. 19,684/- and state showed the expenditure involved in the commutation of other kinds of *begār* in addition to *athwara* and road *begār*, Rs. 545/-. Thus, the state had the profit of Rs. 19,139/- by the commutation of *begār* into cash.<sup>30</sup> The Keonthal state had the profit of Rs. 3,810/- on the commutation of all kinds of *begār*. Mehlog had showed a small loss but possibly the cost of road upkeep had been over estimated.<sup>31</sup> Other states such as Baghal, Kumarsian, Mahlog, Kuthar etc. also showed profit on commutation.

Koti state had shown a fairly large loss but in view of the small area, it was observed that they have much over-estimated the cost of road upkeep. Revenue of holding on which *begār* was taken was Rs. 14,922/- and *athwara* has commuted into cash on the rate of 20% which amounted Rs. 2,984/-. It has estimated Rs. 3,000/- on the upkeep of roads and Rs. 3,040/- as the cost of abolishing *begār* other than *athwara* and road *begār*. Thus, it showed a loss of Rs. 3,056/-. Madhan had shown a fairly large total deficit of Rs. 3,839/-. The rest of the states were satisfactory except Ratesh and Dhadi, the smallest, for whom it was suggested its merger. In Dhadi state, the land revenue on the holding on which *begār* was taken was Rs. 100/- and state estimated Rs. 260/- on the commutation of *athwara begār*. The road *begār* was taken at the rate of 20% which

29. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1944, B.No.26, S.No. 611, p.106

30. *Ibid* p. 111.

31. *Ibid* p. 107.

amounted Rs. 20/-. But it estimated the cost of road upkeep Rs. 180/- and Rs. 500/- in abolition of other kinds of *begār* other than *athwara* and road *begār*. *Athwara* was not commuted into cash but Rs. 20/- was taken from the commutation of road *begār*, and showed the deficit of Rs. 920/-.<sup>32</sup> In such small states commutation of *athwara* was not possible due to its low income.

Thus the commutation of *begār* into cash seems to be profitable to the states as well as to the people. People could earn more money by outside wages than the burden of *begār*. The states could get surplus money which could be used for other purposes in their respective state.





## *Chapter-V*

# *Abolition of the Begār System*

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Before the advent of the British, the *begār* system was widespread all over the hill states. In those areas which were occupied by the British Government (then the British Indian Company) efforts were made to decrease the burden of *begār* system by commencing the act of laws. It was not always possible to enforce anti-*begār* laws in the hilly regions where human labour could not easily be replaced by animal labour due to the difficult geographical situations and the social customs and conditions of the people.

That the *begār* system was an evil is beyond dispute. All the settlement officers had condemned *begār*, particularly *athwara*, as a complete evil which oppressed the people and interfered seriously with their cultivation. Mr. Coldstream has given his views about this evil system in the Rampur settlement report, "The state should bear in mind that all *begār* or unpaid labour is an evil. It may be necessary to keep up a little of it at present, as has been done on account of the inconvenience and trouble which, the sudden complete abandonment of the system, would cause. But it may be hoped that in the near future it may be possible to dispense with it altogether."<sup>1</sup>

The attention of the British authorities in the cis-Sutlej area was drawn for the first time to this cruel custom in December, 1813. Major General Ochterlony, while touring the cis-Sutlej hill states, met with complaints, wherever he went, against this practice of *begār*. He was thus induced to abolish the evil. He issued orders to the commanding officers to stop the use of *begār* labour by making adequate arrangements for the conveyance of the luggage of the troops. In order that an army on the march should suffer no inconveniences, the chiefs, who lived along the road, were asked to furnish every assistance, while the British troops were to pay for what they received.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Emerson quoted in his *Note on Reduction of Atharu Labour* appended to the Assessment Report of Rohru Tehsil of the Bushahr State, 1914, para I.
  2. Mian Bashir Ahmed Farooqi, *British Relations with the Cis-Sutlej States 1809-1823*, Punjab Government Record, 1941 p. 51

This was, however, one aspect of the *begār* system that was removed. There was another which was yet in vogue, namely, that the hill chiefs were required to furnish a number of *begāris*. They often failed to do so and the British authorities on the spot had to use rigorous measures before they could obtain the necessary *begār* labour.<sup>3</sup>

The supreme government was not blind to the hardship and injustice which this system caused to the hill chiefs and their subjects. To get rid of this difficulty the Governor-General further directed Major General Ochterlony and other high officers in 1816 to devise means of gradually extinguishing the practice and of substituting some other mode of supplying carriage for military requirements. By means negotiations with the hill chiefs it was finally decided that they should commute their quota of *begār* labour for a money payment.<sup>4</sup> The money thus raised was to be spent on hiring labour and on carriage by mules.

The burden of *begār* on the hill chiefs which was imposed on them by the treaty of 1815, was thus removed partially by commuting it into cash. They had to provide *begāris* when the British officers and officials were on tour in their respective territories. But with the opening of the Hindustan-Tibet road this right was extended even to British visitors. But the people had to bear same burden of *begār* as it was before these concessions granted to the chiefs. It was very difficult for the chief to maintain himself and his administration without *begār* system in the economically underdeveloped society.

The question of the abolition of the *begār* in the hills was of such considerable difficulty, affecting not only the whole economic life of the hills but the revenue of the hill states and their capacity to pay for the service which previously were rendered free.

Many of the states had several settlements between 1884 and 1932. Previous to these settlements *begār*, especially *athwara*, was exacted ruthlessly and without any limit in the Shimla Hill States.<sup>5</sup> Usually the people were compelled to be on duty at the *darbar* or wherever else for six months in the year.

3. *Ibid.* p. 51

4. *Ibid.* p. 52.

5. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943. B.No 26, S. No. 611, p. 99.

While most British visitors had no compunction in utilizing a system sanctioned by the treaties, some officials such as William Edwards were repelled by it. Edwards, Shimla's Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Hill States from 1847 till 1852 viewed *begār* as nothing short of an insupportable and fearful system of serfdom. He passed an order to promote education in the Shimla hills that those parents who sent their children to government schools could be exempted from *begār*. The result of this order was that in the Shimla school attendance rose to hundred.<sup>6</sup> He also tried to limit the use of *begār*. A complaint against Edwards' order described the impossibility of complying with it and Edwards' scheme was subsequently abandoned by his successor, William Hay.

During the settlements, between 1884 and 1932 in the hill states, people began to feel the burden of the *begār* system. The settlement officers also considered it oppressive because it interfered with the working of the peasants during their crop season. This had caused a great loss to the people as well as to the state. As a result of this oppression *athwara* was accordingly completely abolished in many states by commuting it into cash on the basis of land revenue. It was commuted at the rate of 10% in Nalagarh and Mehlog, 12½% in Kumarsian, Bhajji and Kunihar, 11% in Baghal and Beja, 10% in Dhami, 13% in Khaneti and 20% in Koti state. The commutation rate of the states of Jubbal, Baghat, Kuthar and Shangri was unknown.<sup>7</sup> At the same time mule *begār* was also commuted in every state to Rs. 5/- or 6/- per-annum for shopkeepers and half rates for *zamindars'* mules.

In the states of Bushahr, Keonthal, Theog, Madhan and Ghund *athwara* was abolished partially. In Bushahr state, during the settlement of 1890-93, 5 months service was reduced to one month without cess, but during the settlement of 1914-15 the remaining one month was also reduced to 15 days and other 15 days were commuted to cess of 1/4 of existing commutation fees. In Keonthal state it was commuted at 14% of the land revenue except in *pargana* Parala which was the seat of the *darbar* and of *Ahlkars*. In Theog, Madhan and Ghund it was reduced to one month per annum per holding.<sup>8</sup>

6. Pamela Kanwar, Imperial Simla, Delhi, 1990, p. 29

7. *Begār in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, S.No. 611, p. 100

8. *Ibid* p. 100

The remaining states except Balson were very small and had no settlement. However even in them *begār* was limited to one month or less except in Ratesh, the smallest state in which 90 days *athwara* was taken. In the states where rebellions occurred, such as Theog, Kumarsain etc. the remaining *begār* namely *hela*, tours of chief, *gaonsar*, etc. were agreed to by the villagers at the time. In Bushahr, *gaonsar begār* was stopped except for government and state *chaprasis* who were allowed one coolie each when travelling but it was stipulated that villages should have deductions from their revenue as well as equivalent remission of regular *begār* (*athwara*) on this account.

During the years from 1932 to 1940, in Theog and Ghund, half, that is 15 days of the remaining one month *athwara* was commuted on payment of cess of 8% and 8% respectively. The two were optional on peasants who may or may not commute, as they prefer, the other 15 days remained. In Madhan the peasants had the option to commute the 30 days at 7½%. In Bushahr road *begār* was limited to 3 to 8 days. In Nalagarh road *begār* was abolished and commuted at 3% in the plains and 7% in hills. In Baghal and Koti unpaid labour on the occasions of the tours of the chief and officials within the state was abolished. In Baghat, no *begār* of any description was taken. In Kuthar, all *begār* was abolished. In Beja, all *begār* except road *begār* was totally abolished.<sup>9</sup>

The position upto the beginning of the fourth decade of the 20th century was that *athwara begār* had been totally abolished in Jubbal, Baghat and Kuthar. It had been totally commuted in Nalagarh, Baghal, Kumarsian, Bhajji, Mehlog, Dhami, Kunihar, Beja, Shangri, Khaneti and Koti. It had been partially commuted in Bushahr, Keonthal, Theog, Madhan and Ghund. It was neither abolished nor commuted in Balson, Mangal, Darkoti, Throach, Delath, Ratesh, Rawingarh and Dhadi. *Begār* other than *athwara* continued in various form in all states with a few exceptions such as in Jubbal, where *begār* had been abolished but occasionally conscripted on payment when mules or men were not available. In Baghat and Kuthar no *begār* was taken. In Mahlog and Beja all *begār* was abolished except road *begār*. In Tharoch labour for camp arrangements were paid for at 6 annas per day plus food. In Jubbal, Baghat and Kuthar roads were kept up by the state.

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9. *Ibid.* p. 101

People of the Shimla Hill States were not satisfied with these concessions. Uptill that time unpaid forced labour existed nowhere except the Shimla Hill States.<sup>10</sup> Settlement Officer also had asserted *begār* as an evil which affected the prosperity of the cultivators and their loyalty to the rulers, and that of the various form were more objectionable and mischievous than the others. As a result of it crown representative considered it desirable that a general policy should be framed to deal with the hardship caused by *begār* and *beth* in the hill states. Enquiries were made for the total abolition of *begār* and *beth* by the Political Agent and he sent his suggestions to the crown representative to consider about the abolition. Thus, for its abolition a 'Model Policy' was framed, on the basis of the enquiries.

A meeting with the rulers of hill states was convened on 24th August, 1943 to discuss the frame policies regarding *begār* and *beth*.<sup>11</sup> It was attended by the representative rulers and *diwans* of the various hill states. It was held under the chairmanship of the hon'ble the Resident of Punjab Hill States. The object of this meeting was to ascertain the views of representative rulers and *diwans* on the gernal policy to be adopted. The policy was finally recommended by the crown representative and served as a model which was to be adopted to local condition by each states.<sup>12</sup>

As regards *begār*, it were explained that it included:

- (a) Unpaid forced labour.
- (b) Paid forced labour.

All forms of unpaid labour were abolished forthwith and the certain states which were bound to provide under their *sanads* free forced labour, were relinquished by the crown without commutation. Where the abolition was not practicable in that stage of development it was to be paid for normally in cash, at minimum rates published by authority.<sup>13</sup> Various classes of *begār* were discussed in relation to the policy.

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10. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1939, B.No. 19, S.No. 489, p. 174.

11. *Begar in Simla Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1943, B.No. 26, S.No. 611, p. 153.

12. *Ibid.* p. 154

13. *Ibid.* p. 154



*Athwara*, as it formed, with road *begār* part of land tenure was totally abolished and commuted into a cess. It was agreed except in very exceptional circumstances, the total cess was not to exceed 33% of the revenue inclusive of road *begār* and all other cesses and that it was to vary below this figure in accordance with variations in the land revenue rates. In the areas in which this maximum had been reached by commutation, a reduction was required, before commuting road *begār*.

As regards *batrawal* (public works), this form of *begār* was to be provided for in P.W.D. budgets and done departmentally. As regards *hela* (special occasions), provided this labour was paid for in kind or cash, and demand maintained its 'paternal' character.<sup>14</sup> It was decided that there was no harm in its continuance and it was continued as earlier.

As regards *dak begār*, it was decided that in certain districts this *begār* was essential, and if it was to be paid for it was to continue. It was to be progressively reduced by the introduction of departmental *dak* runners of the system in vogue in British India. *Gaonsar begār* (porterages), as it was also essential, was continued on payment, until there was adequate bridle paths and plenty of animal transport available. *Shikar begār* was continued on the condition of payment.

As regards road *begār* except village paths in outlying tracts, which were maintained by the villagers themselves, the motorable roads and forest roads were to be maintained by P.W.D. and Forest Department respectively. It was suggested that labour was to be made available in most areas by offering the villagers the choice between cash commutation and labour at scheduled rates as there existed no labour class in most hill states. The commutation of road *begār* was to be maximum of 10% of land revenue, leaving 23% as the maximum for all other cesses.<sup>15</sup>

As regards the *beth* system, the hardships of the *bethus* employed by the state were removed. It was explained that remedy rendering personal service as a condition of land tenure was opposed to public conscience as having an element of slavery. It was abolished with one exception of *palki* service, for the ladies of ruling families. It was to be paid for.<sup>16</sup>

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14. *Ibid.* p. 155

15. *Ibid.* p. 155

16. *Ibid.* p. 156



Occupancy rights were given to those *bethus* who had worked in their lands for three generations. The land revenue assessment for occupancy rights was fixed at double the normal land revenue plus cesses. The onus of proof that a *bethu* had not been in possession for three generations was laid on the owner of the land.

By giving occupancy right to *bethus* if it was likely to embarrass rulers, by establishing occupancy tenants too close to rulers dwelling, he had the right to exchange such land further away.

These *bethus* who had not been in possession of land for three generations were made tenants at will on a cash rent. It was thought that if a *bethu* went to court under the provisions of the Punjab Tenancy Act 1887, the court would never decree that personal service was legally enforceable.

The *ranas* of Balson and Koti asked for further time to furnish their considered view on these points.<sup>17</sup> The Resident agreed that he would await until 15th Sept., 1943, any representations in this connection from any ruler, either singly or jointly.

As regards the *bethus*, employed by the *zamindars*, it was agreed that the actual status and any hardship arising therefrom was to be considered in each area at the next settlement.

The model policies on *beth* and *begār* after its approval by the crown representative, were forwarded to the rulers of Shimla Hill States in Oct. 1944. Each state had to apply the model policy forthwith according to the local conditions. They were required to furnish after every six months a report on the progress achieved in applying this policy. They had to sent information by the 15th December and 15th June each year.<sup>18</sup> The progress achieved by applying *begār* model policy upto June, 1945 was that in the states of Jubbal, Baghat, Tharoch, Shangri and Beja, the *begār* system had already abolished before the adoption of this policy. In the states of Nalagarh, Keonthal, Kumarsian, Bhajji, Theog, Madhan, Ghund, Mehlog, Balson, Baghal, Kunihar, Delath, Dhadi, Rawingarh, Khaneti and Darkoti, the *begār* policy was applied. With the adoption of this policy unpaid forced labour was abolished and paid forced labour was taken for the following purposes only:<sup>19</sup>

17. Ibid. p. 156

18. Begar in Punjab Hill States, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1944, B.No.14, S.No. 451, p.20

19. Ibid. p. 250

(i) Tours of high officials

(iii) *Hela*(ii) *Dak*(iv) *Shikar*

No progress report was received from the states of Bushahr, Koti, Kuthar, Mangal and Ratesh upto that time. In those states the burden was also accordingly reduced.

As the working of the *begār* policy had disclosed the need of further modifications, certain amendments were made in it. As the *begār* policy did not provide for the taking of forced labour for marking forest, paid forced labour was included for it in the *begār* policy in April, 1946. The penalty for refusal to render paid forced labour by any adult male was not by reason of health or otherwise, exempt from rendering forced paid labour, was fixed not exceeding Rs. 20/-. Such fine was to be imposed by a revenue court and to be recorded as an arrear of land revenue.<sup>20</sup>

The progress on applying the *beth* policy upto June, 1945 was that, in the states of Nalagarh, Baghat, Beja and Shangri there were no *bethus*. In Bhajji *beth* had been commuted into cash in 1929. In the states of Baghal, Keonthal, Madhan, Theog, Ghund, Dhadi, Mehlog, Koti, Khaneti, Kumarsian, Kunihar, Rawingarh, Balson, Darkoti and Ratesh the model *beth* policy was applied. It was not applied by the rulers of Kuthar, Jubbal, Mangal, Tharoch and Delath. The rulers of Bushahr and Dhami had already granted occupancy or non-occupancy rights to *bethus* before the policy.<sup>21</sup>

The progress report received by the British Government upto August 1946 was that except the state of Mangal, *begār* policy was applied by all the Shimla Hill States and paid forced labour was taken only on the occasion given in the model policy. In Mangal there had been no settlement and land revenue was paid in kind and by service.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, with the adoption of the model *begār* policy by the Shimla Hill States unpaid forced labour came to an end. The *begār* system had been already abolished in Kangra proper in 1884,<sup>23</sup> and in Chamba and Mandi states.

20. *Reforms Beth and Begar*, Punjab Hill States Agency, Vol. I, 1946, B.No. 21, S.No. 533, p. 76-77.

21. *Begar in Punjab Hill States*, Punjab Hill States Agency, 1946, B.No. 17, S.No. 451, p. 246-247

22. *Reform-Beth and Begar*, Punjab Hill States Agency, Vol. II, 1946, B.No. 22, S.No. 555.

23. *Punjab District Gazetteer, Kangra District*, Vol. VII, Part-A. 1924, Lahore, 1926, p. 359.

With the enactment of Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Act, 1947, the central government conferred in the different territories of Himachal Pradesh the occupancy rights as specified in the Punjab Tenancy Act, 1887, on all the *bethus* who had been in cultivatory possession of states' land for three generations, on payment of rent equal of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  times the land revenue and cesses chargeable on land. It was further ordered that full proprietary rights in such land were granted to such *bethus* (occupancy tenants) on payment of a sum equal to 10 times, the land revenue and cesses assessed on such lands.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, *begār* paid or unpaid was prohibited within the territory of Himachal Pradesh with effect from May, 1948.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, *begār* system which had heavily suppressed the people for a long time, came to an end as people got facilities of education, means of communication and transport. It was also due to the awakening of political consciousness among the people of hill states provoked by the organisation of *Praja Mandals*.



Mrs. Figgs insists on riding in a dandy.

24. *General Statutory Rules and order*. Vol. VI, 1964, Nasik, p. 21

25. *Development Profile of Himachal Pradesh*, Issued by the Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Shimla, 1985, p. 194

## *Conclusion*

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After studying all the aspect of *begār* prevalent in the hills especially in the Shimla Hill States, it can safely be deduced that in the olden days it was the necessity of the time. This was, because in those days there were no roads and no system of transportation to carry necessities of life from one place to another, human labour alone was available. The villages were sparsely populated. By this necessity the custom of *begār* had grown up in the Shimla hills and it had sanction of very old time in the hilly regions of the country.

The obligation of *begār* was part and parcel of the land revenue system. It was very often associated with the cultivation of land. It was well suited to the conditions of the state when money was limited and the people were economically and socially unsound.

The rulers were the overall owner of the land in their respective states. The best and large tracts of agricultural land was in the hands of a small number of *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, temples and high officials of the states. But these landholders had not enough strength of men to cultivate their lands. On the other hand, people from lower classes formed the major portion of the population, but they were mostly landless or had little land with them. As the tradition prevailed, the people of lower castes had no right to own land. These people were employed by the rulers and the big landlords to cultivate their land and at times to carry loads from one place to another. In lieu of these services they were given small pieces of land for their subsistence. The people whether from upper or lower castes, who possessed even a small piece of land were bound to render *begār* and perform other duties towards the ruler because they did not pay land revenue in cash. The *begār* service included in collecting grass and firewood in the capital and do some other work and contribute at the times of marriages and deaths in the royal house. It also included all the public works.

It was a sort of unequal exchange wherein one got a working hand for his fields and other work, and the other got land to cultivate and was thus able to earn his livelihood. The *begār* system obviously was not

so beneficial to the lower classes. Comparatively it was the big landlords who were greater beneficiaries. The lower cultivating classes had generally very small pieces of land which were frequently less fertile. The *bethu* had to lead a very miserable life and depended on their masters at the time of scarcity and famine. In this way these people of lower classes remained economically poor and exploited.

The *begār* system lost even its few positive features with the passage of time and remained necessarily in the form of an exploitative custom in the history of Shimla Hill States. After the expulsion of the Gorkhas from the hill states the British government concluded treaties with the chiefs of hill states. According to the provisions of the treaties it reinstated the chiefs in their hill possessions, they were asked to furnish a quota of *begāris* to the British officials and troops, in proportion to the revenue they raised in their territories, while passing through their respective territories, besides other conditions.

When the Britishers became aware of the socio-economic conditions of the people of the Shimla Hill States, they found the *begār* system an oppressive and evil custom because people were being suppressed unduly under this custom. As a result the British Government stopped extracting *begār* except in exceptional cases from the rulers. They also encouraged the rulers to reduce this burden imposed on hill people, simultaneously.

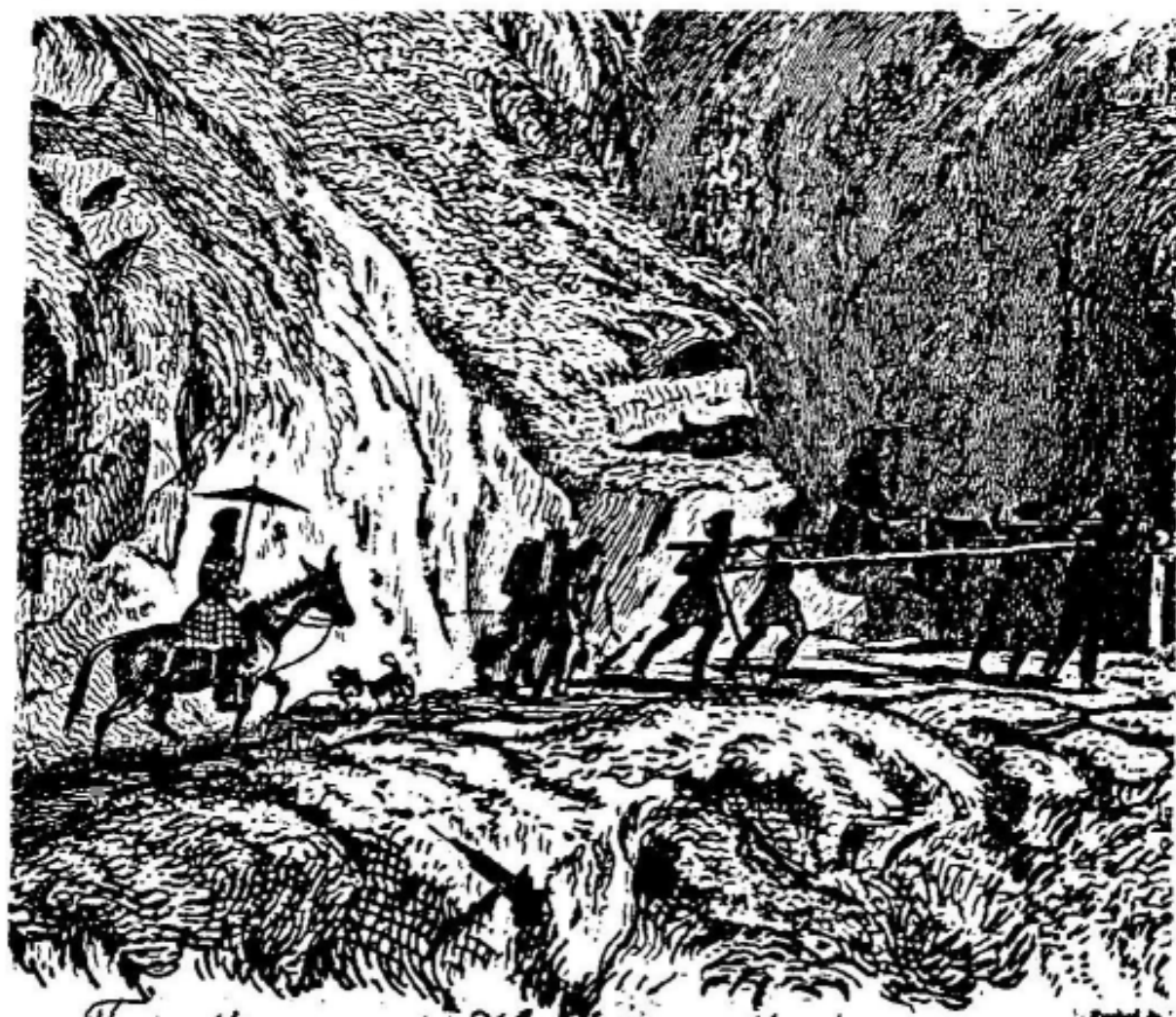
The question of abolition of *begār* in the hills was the matter of such a considerable difficulty that its abolition did not suit the low cash economy of hill society. As soon as the people got opportunities to earn money by outside wages in the beginning of 20th century, this system started losing its importance. British government had to make provisions to abolish this custom as the result of the bitter resistance from the hill people against *begār* and *beth* system. As it was difficult to abolish *begār* in one single stroke as it was to disrupt the economic life of the hill states as well as of the people, it was abolished step by step.

By the end of the third decade of the 20th century, regional, social and political organisations such as *Praja Mandals* were organised in the Shimla Hill States to gain their political goals. These organisations also made the complete abolition of the oppressive custom of *begār* and *beth* as one of their goals. In this way these regional organisations raised



political consciousness among the people of the hill states and made representations to British government against this oppressive custom. As a result the British had to prepare a model policy on *begār* and *beth* in consultation with the rulers on the basis of enquiries in the Shimla Hill States in the beginning of the fourth decade of the 20th century. After its approval from the crown representative, the model policy was adopted by all Shimla Hill States and henceforth *begār* or unpaid forced labour came to an end. Paid forced labour was allowed only when the labourers were not available.

With the independence of India the democratic process was applied in the administration all over the country, and rulers and their subjects became equal before law. Thus, the *begār* and *beth* system which had suppressed the people for centuries and made them live in conditions of object poverty was completely abolished. Finally *begār* paid or unpaid was prohibited in Himachal Pradesh from 1948.



*Travelling on the Himalayan Mountains.* London. P. 3. 4.



*Appendix-1*

"Statement showing the States which have abolished athwara begār with or without the levy of a cess in lieu thereof.

S. No.	Name of State.	Commutation in percentage of land revenue.
1.	Sirmur	-----
2.	Bilaspur	-----
3.	Nalagarh	11%
4.	Keonthal	14%
5.	Kalsia	-----
6.	Baghal	11%
7.	Jubbal	-----
8.	Baghat	State charge certain percentage as commutation.
9.	Kumarsain	$12\frac{1}{2}\%$
10.	Bhajji	$12\frac{1}{2}\%$
11.	Mahlog	10%
12.	Dhami	18%
13.	Kunihar	$12\frac{1}{2}\%$
14.	Bija	11%
15.	Khaneti	12%
16.	Koti	20%

States in which 1/2 athwara has been abolished.

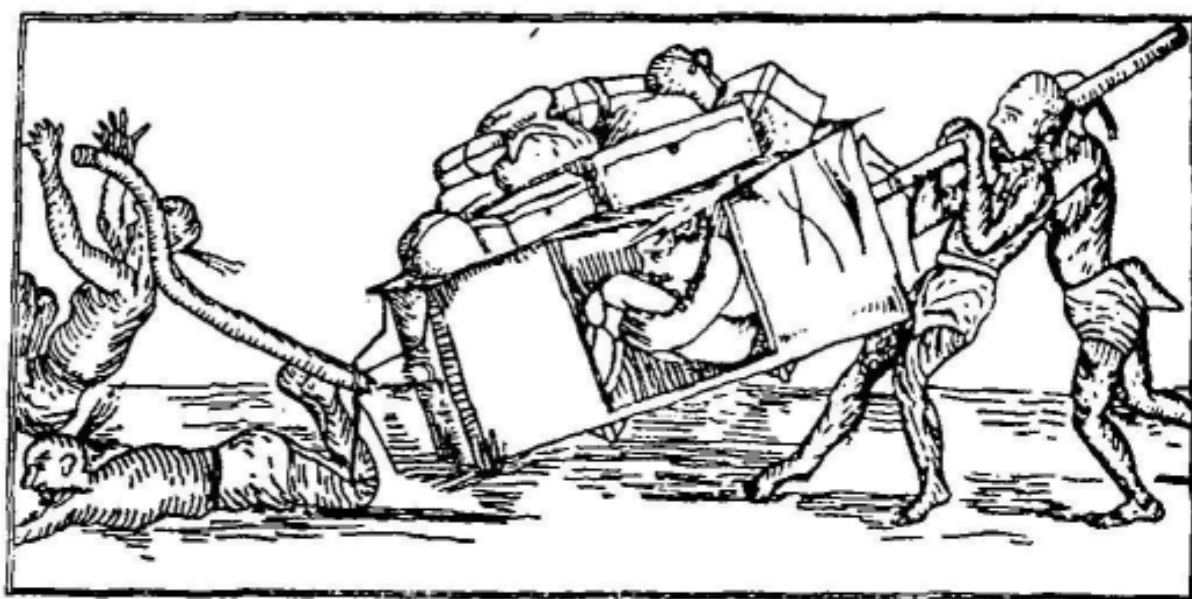
1.	Bashahr	15 days and no commutation fee is charged for the remaining half athwara.
2.	Theog	15 days + 8% of land revenue.
3.	Ghund	15 days + 8% of land revenue.

States in which athwara begar exists but the zamindars have the option to pay cash commutation

1.	Madhan	Rs. 7/8- p.a. per year
2.	Rawingarh	Rs. 7/- --do--
3.	Sangri	4/- p.a. per year
4.	Kuthar	7/-?

States in which athwara is exacted.

1.	Tharoch
2.	Dhadi
3.	Delath
4.	Darkoti
5.	Mangal
6.	Balsan
7.	Ratesh"



Delhi Sketch Book.

Ensign P on his journey by dawk.

## Appendix-2

The statement in this appendix shows that the abolition of *begār* and its commutation into cash was profitable in some states and causing loss in some other states.

“Extract from a note on reduction of atharu labour, prepared by Mr. H.W. Emerson.

The following note on the system of atharu labour is intended mainly for the information of my successors. The problem is a difficult one, and the views and suggestions now put forward are not intended to bind anyone to a definite course of action.

(1) Mr. Coldstream in paragraph 37 of his review of the Rampur *Settlement Report* expressed the following opinion: “The State should (*evils of the system.*) bear in mind that all begar or unpaid labour is an evil. It may be necessary to keep up a little of it at present, as has been done on account of the inconvenience and trouble which the sudden complete abandonment of the system would cause. But it may be hoped that in the near future it may be possible to dispense with it altogether” The reduction of the period of atharu from six months to one month was faithfully carried out, but no future advance has been made since last settlement, and in some ways the difficulties attending the complete abolition of the system have increased. In others, however they have diminished, notably through the improved financial resources of the State. That the system is an evil is beyond dispute. The people loathe it more than any other burden, and there are very few who are not ready to pay the commutation fee rather than give the month's labour. This is natural, for with a large rise in the rates paid for casual labour a month spent without payment means a considerable loss, which is often more than the amount of the monthly earnings. It interferes seriously with a man taking quasi-permanent labour. Thus, in a household containing two able-bodied men, one will usually go on to some forest work in Bashahr and Garhwal. But, as soon as the second brother is called upon to do his period of atharu, the first has to come home again, and he rarely returns to the forest. In families where there is only one adult male the hardship

is felt still more severely. He may have a wife and several small children, and the wife may be about to give birth to another child when the man's turn comes to give service. He will either have to go, or purchase exemption by bribing the patwari or lambardar. However careful the supervision be, the system is inevitably the cause of much corruption and abuse. The State gets nothing like a month's work out of each contributor. The object of the atharu is to do as little as possible in return for nothing, and one cannot blame him. But the consequence is that, apart from the economic wastage, habits of idleness are fostered and the effects are demoralising to all concerned. The more fact that there are atharus leads to extravagant demands for their service. As an example, the case of a Koli clerk in a Government Department may be quoted. He applied for the use of a Kanet atharu to wait on him. The request was, of course, refused, but the point of view was typical.

(2) *The complete abolition of the system* is desirable, but (*Difficulties in the way of sudden abolition*) difficulties arise when ways and means are examined. Its abandonment must be gradual, for it implies at least partial compensation to the state in other forms, and the danger is that new burdens would be imposed, while the old one would be quietly restored, so much has the state come to depend on free labour.

The principal ways in which it is employed at present, or was employed until recently, are:

- (1) At stages on the Hindustan-Tibet road and elsewhere.
- (2) For the collection of grass and fuel at Rampur.
- (3) By way of an allowance to state servants.
- (4) For the provision of grass, fuel and water to the Raja's establishment.
- (5) On public works.
- (6) In bringing state loads from Simla.

\* \* \* \* \*

(4) *As to the employment of free labour on public works*, there (*The question of public works.*) are two points of view. On the one hand, the state gains, as even the low standard of work given represents more than the labour purchasable by the commutation fees. On the other hand the loss of the people is far more than the gain to the state, and as long as

the practice is continued of using unpaid labour on public works, there can be no reduction of the system. During the next few years there will be a number of irrigation channels made and other works carried out; but when these are completed the scope for useful expenditure will be limited. If a substantial grant is made to the state by Government from forest revenues, sufficiently rapid progress can be made by paying for all work done. Even without such a grant, the state finances are now in a satisfactory state, and the works contemplated can be gradually finished. The extra time involved by employing only paid labour will probably be a year at most. On the other hand, it is by that no means unlikely that if the atharu system is not reduced to a minimum during the next few years, it will continue as of old for another generation at least. For this reason, I believe it desirable to make a firm stand now, rather than postpone action on account of public works. I would therefore suggest that, for the future, no unpaid labour be employed on state buildings or public works of any kind.

\* \* \* \* \*

(7) The question remains as to whether, in the case of reduction or compensation, abolition, the State should exact compensation, and if so, in what form. It would clearly be entitled to do so, but if the revenues continue to increase, it may be unnecessary to enforce its right.

\* \* \* \* \*

(8) To sum up, my suggestions are:

(1) The immediate restriction of the employment of atharu labour to stages, to supplying the needs of the Raja's establishment, and to providing Rampur with grass and charcoal.

(2) The gradual abolition of the system.

\* \* \* \* \*

(9) *The above discussion has taken no account of the atharus whose (Atharus whose services are used by private individuals or institutions). services are utilized by individuals or institutions, in whose favour the state has sanctioned grants.*

The abolition of the system would undoubtedly give rise to a number of private claims for compensation. But, while every case would have to be considered on its merits, the general principle might be laid down, that the State when making the grants gave no guarantee that it

would always continue the system. They were contingent on the state itself enforcing its claim to unpaid labour. Thus, when at last settlement the period was reduced from six months to one, no claims for compensation to individual were recognised as far as I know nor in the Rohru Tahsil should any be upheld on account of the present reduction."

## STATEMENT NO. I

"State	Cess	Athwara begār cess	Total	Average revenue rates per bigha, on Bakhal land.
Patiala	13%	no begār	13%	
Bashahr Rampur	25%	12½%	37½%	As. -3/8
Rohru	22½%	-	34½%	
Nalagarh	13%	11%	31% (pahar)	
			27% (des)	As. -7/3
Keonthal	11%	14%	25%	As. -8/3
Baghal	14%	11%	25%	As. -5/2
Jubbal	25%	no begār	25%	As. -5/3
Baghat	13%	no begār	13%	
Kumarsain	12½%	12½%	25%	As. -4/10
Bhajji	12½%	12½%	25%	As. -10/6
Mahlog	15%	10%	25%	As. -5/-
Dhami	7%	18%	25%	As. 7/8
Kunihar	12½%	12½%	25%	As. -8/-
Bija	11%	11%	22%	
Khaneti	12%	13%	25%	As. -6/11
Koti	10%	20%	30%	As. -9/8
Theog	25%	8%	35%	As. -7/2
Madhan	25%	7½%	32½%	As. 7/-
Ghund	16%	8%	24%	As. -7/8
Kotkhai	18%		18%	As. -5/2
Kotgarh	8%		8%	As. -5/3/8
Outer Saraj (Kulu)				As. -5/3"



## STATEMENT NO. II

(1) State/ Estate	(2) land revenue of holdings on which begar is taken	(3) Athwara cess (now existing)	(4) Amount	(5) State/ Estate's estimate of expense involved in abolition of athwara begar	(6) Road cess. (now proposed)	(7) Amount	(8) State's/ Estate's estimate of expense involved in abolition of road begar.	(9) State's/ Estate's estimate of expense involved in abolition of all other kinds of begar	(10) Total of columns 4 and 7.	(11) Total of columns 5, 8 and 9.	(12) Surplus	(13) Deficit
Bashahr	69,112/-	12 <sup>1/2</sup> %	8,733/-	28,000/-	7 <sup>1/2</sup> %	5,183/-	6000/-	-	13,916/-	34,000/-		20,084/-
Nalagarh	124,857/-	11%	13,744/-	-	7% (pahar) 3% (des)	5,940/-	545/-	-	19,684/-	545/-	19,139/-	
Keonthal	47,851/-	14%	6,699/-	-	6%	2,871/-	4,650/-	1,110/-	9,570/-	5,760/-	3,810/-	
Baghal	48,259/-	11%	5,408/-	-	9%	4,343/-	1,332/-	1,132/-	9,751/-	2,464/-	7,287/-	
Kumarsain	22,235/-	12 <sup>1/2</sup> %	2,779/-	-	7%	1,667/-			4,446/-			
Bhajji	35,934/-	12 <sup>1/2</sup> %	4,490/-	-	7 <sup>1/2</sup> %	2,680/-	200/-	240/-	7,170/-	440/-	6,730/-	
Mahlog	14,373	10%	1,437/-	700/-	10%	1,437/-	3,430/-	700/-	2,874/-	4,830/-		1,956/-
Balson	6,000/-	10%	600/-		10%	600/-			1,200/-			
Dhami	13,894/-	18%	2,501/-		2%	277/-			2,778/-			
Kunihar	6,950/-	12 <sup>1/2</sup> %	869/-	-	7%	521/-	400/-	400/-	1,390/-	800/-	590/-	
Mangal	962/-			360/-			150/-	300/-		210/-		
Bija	2,027/-	11%	223/-	-	9%	182/-	-		-405/-	-	-	-
Darkoti	675/-	-	-		20% (all begar)	135/-			135/-	-	-	-
Sangri	4,240/-	38%	1,640	-	10% (special	424/-	1,000/-	200/-	2,064/-	1,200/-	864/-	
Tharoch	225/-			-	20% cess)	45/-	-	-	45/-	-		
Khaneti	3,615/-	13%	469/-	162/-	7%	253/-	150/-	113/-	722/-	425/-	297/-	
Koti.	14,922/-	20%	2,984/-	-			3,000/-	3,040/-	2,984/-	6,040/-		3056/-
Theog	5,814/-	8%	456/-	-	10%	580/-	500/-	500/-	1,045/-	1,000/-	45/-	
Madhan	7,212/-	7 <sup>1/2</sup> %	541/-	1,600/-	10%	720/-	1,500/-	2,000/-	1,261/-	5,100/-		3839/-
Ghund	3,906/-	8%	312/-		10%	390/-	660/-	240/-	702/-	900/-		198/-
Ratesh	312/-			200/-			300/-	25/-		525/-		
Rawingarh	600/-	10%	60/-		10%	60/-			120/-			
Dhadi	100/-			260/-	20%	20/-	180/-	500/-	20/-	940/-		920/-

## STATEMENT NO. III

"State/Estate	Number of holdings on which begar is taken	Area of holdings on which begar is taken (in bighas)	Number of holdings on which begar is exempted	Area of holdings on which begar is exempted. (in bighas)
Bashahr	11,157		7,710	
Nalagarh	15770	6,33,040	1,150	1,47,120
Keonthal	2,066	2,03,734	272	26,381
Baghal	7,342	3,09,445	1,361	95,005
Kumarsain	1,622	83,153	148	16,301
Mahlog	2,689	70,120	281	80,870
Balson	500	25,000	25	10,000
Dhami	387	39,803	113	10,145
Bija	119	4,085	174	11,050
Tharoch	150		75	
Sangri	410	7,690	141	3,196
Khaneti	368	12,720	99	5,160
Koti		49,277		1,00,711
Theog	628	30,613	255	20,774
Madhan	396	30,260	14	5,767
Ghund	226	12,254	91	3,048
Ratash		114		
Rawingarh	65	1,500	22	2,500"

### *Appendix-3*

These are the dates of last settlement and proceedings of the meeting for new settlement in Shimla Hill States.

"Name of State or Estate	Year in which the last settle- ment was carried out.	Remarks
1. Tehri-Garhwal	1923-34	The next settlement was due in 1943-44 but postponed on account of war
2. Sirmur	1930-32	The term of settlement is 40 years.
3. Bilaspur	1933	The term of settlement is 25 years.
4. Bashahr	1927-28	Chini Tehsil 1927-28, Rohru Tehsil 1913-14, Rampur Tehsil 1915-16.
5. Nalagarh	1924 (pahar ilaqa) 1927 (Des ilaqa")	Term 30 years.
6. Keonthal	1914	The term of settlement is 30 years.
7. Kalsia	1913-14	The next settlement was due in 1938 but postponed due to war.
8. Baghal	1907	The term of settlement is 20 years.
9. Jubbal	1907	The term was 30 years
10. Baghat	1910	The settlement is due but postponed owing to war.
11. Kumarsain	1927	The term of settlement is 30 years.
12. Bhajji	1923	The term of settlement is 20 years.

13.	Mehlog	1910	The term of settlement was 20 years in the first instance but was subsequently extended by 5 years.
14.	Balsan		Settlement is being conducted
15.	Dhami	1916	The term of settlement is 30 years.
16.	Kuthar	1917	The term of settlement is 15 years.
17.	Kunihar	1924	The term of the settlement is 20 years.
18.	Mangal	No settlement	
19.	Bija	1921	The term of settlement is 30 years.
20.	Darkoti	1914	The term of settlement was 20 years and was exceeded by 10 years.
21.	Tharoch	no settlement in the past nor contemplated in future.	
22.	Sangri	There was no settlement in the past and the people are against it.	
23.	Khaneti	1930	The term of the settlement is 30 years.
24.	Delath	Settlement is being conducted.	
25.	Koti	1917	The term of settlement was 20 years.
26.	Theog	1934	The term is 30 years
27.	Madhan	1911	The term was 20 years in the first instance but was subsequently extended by 10 years.
28.	Ghund	1931	The term is 30 years.
29.	Ratesh	There is only summary settlement. no further settlement is expected.	
30.	Rawingarh	1908	The re-settlement is under consideration.
31.	Dhadi	1883-84	No further settlement is contemplated."

"Proceedings of the meeting held on 2nd August 1943 in the visitor's room of the Foreign Office Building Simla, S.W.

*Present*

1. Major R.G.E.W. Alban, O.B.E., Political Agent.
2. Mr. R.I. Hallows, Assistant Political Agent.
3. Mr. Anant Ram, Minister Baghat State.
4. R.S. Basant Lal, Manager, Keonthal State.
5. M. Dina Nath, District and Sessions Judge, Jubbal
6. M. Sher Singh, Magistrate, Tharoch State.
7. M. Manohar Lal, Forest Officer, Madhan.

The following propositions relating to Settlement in Simla Hill States were discussed:

- (a) In view of the fact that several Simla Hill States will during the next few years require new settlements, whether it would be simpler to recruit a competent settlement staff to complete the settlement in these States in accordance with a programme fixed by the Political Agent.
- (b) To what extent the States/Estates can supply staff from among their own personnel to assist the Settlement Officer.

Major Alban said that they had gathered together to discuss the question of settlement in Simla Hill States. For this purpose Joint Settlement Officers for various groups may be employed and this course will be a cheap one. He pointed out that the settlement report of Baghat State had become out of date and there had never been a settlement in Tharoch state. When the re-settlement would be made there would be a rise in revenue rates and thus the State would be benefited by this new undertaking. The Minister Baghat State said that in view of present high prices of stationery and non-availability of competent settlement staff, the question of re-settlement may be postponed for another two years. Major Alban asked him if the Darbar would agree to share the Settlement Officer. The Minister said that the Darbar would engage their own Settlement Officer. The Manager Keonthal State said that he was prepared to undertake the work of settlement in the Tehsil of Junga



straight way, but he would require 8 patwaris and 4 qanungos for one tehsil but if the work was to begin in all the Tehsils, 32 patwaris, one gardawar for each tehsil and in addition 1 N.T. and 1 tehsildar for each tehsil will be required. He said that measurement work could be done only for 4 months in the year. The representative of Jubbal State said that the Raja had no intention to start a new settlement during his life time. As the Raja was already making much money through forests contracts, he did not want any additional revenue to levy on his subjects as a result of a new settlement. If at all they had to undertake the new settlement, the Darbar would prefer to engage their own Settlement Officer. The representative of Tharoch said that in view of the high price of stationary, the settlement may be postponed till after the war, but if the settlement is undertaken they would be prepared to share the services of the settlement Officer of Jubbal. The representative of Madhan said that owing to dearness the settlement may be postponed till after the war. He agreed to share the services of the Settlement Officer of Keonthal State.

It was agreed that Keonthal should start the settlement work straightaway under the supervision of the Manager Keonthal State and that other States should send their patwaris to Junga for training in settlement work. So that this trained Staff may ultimately be utilised by other units for settlement operations in this area.

Submitted

Signed- (illegible)

Dated- 4.8.43"

## Appendix-4

“Minutes of a meeting held in Simla on the 24th August 1943, to discuss and frame policies regarding Begar and Beth.

### *Persons present*

(a) The Hon'ble the Resident for the Punjab States in the chair.

### *(b) States Representatives:*

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 1. Baghat   | 1. Raja Durga Singh, CIE.  |
|             | 2. Mr. Anant Ram, B. A., Bar-at-Law Minister,                              |
| 2. Balsan   | 1. Rana Ran Bahadur Singh Jandaive, Rana of Balsan.                        |
|             | 2. Babu Siri Ram, District Magistrate.                                     |
| 3. Bashahr  | 1. Kanwar Jagetjit Singh, Chief Secretary.                                 |
|             | 2. Negi Pearey Lal, B.A., Foreign and Political Secretary.                 |
| 4. Bilaspur | 1. Mr. C.S. Barara, M.A., L.L.B., Collector.                               |
| 5. Chamba   | 1. Rai Sahib L. Raghbir Singh, P.C.S., (Retd).                             |
| 6. Ghund    | 1. S. Balwant Singh, B.A., Manager.  |
| 7. Jubbal   | 1. Tika Digvijai Chandra, Tika of Jubbal.                                  |
| 8. Keonthal | 1. Rai Sahib Pt. Basant Lal, Manager.                                      |
| 9. Koti     | 1. Tika Bashishth Singh, Tika of Koti.                                     |
|             | 2. S.B. Sardar Gian Singh, District Magistrate.                            |
| 10. Mandi   | 1. Pandit Brij Behari Lal, B.A., (Shashtri), M.R.A.S., Development Member. |
|             | 2. B. Ram Nath, Revenue Assistant  |
| 11. Suket   | 1. L. Chuni Lal, B.A., LL.B.,  |
| 12. Theog   | 1. Thakur Karam Chand Thakur of Theog.                                     |
|             | 2. S. Balwant Singh, Wazir.  |

(c) *Political Officers*

1. Major R.G.E.W. Alban, OBE., Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, Simla.
2. Major F.C.L. Chauncy, Secretary to the Hon'ble the Resident for the Punjab States.

The Resident opened the proceedings by explaining that for some years attempts had been made to lay down a general policy for the elimination of hardships caused by *begār* and *beth* in the Hill States. The object of this meeting was to ascertain the views of representative Rulers and Diwans on the general policy to be adopted. The intention was that the policy, as finally recommended by the Crown Representative, should serve as a model, which could be adapted to local conditions by each State.

I. As regards *begār*, the Crown Representative had already arrived at certain general conclusions, which would now be explained. If any good reasons could be adduced by the meeting in favour of modifying these conclusions, these would be submitted to the Crown Representative.

The general conclusions were explained as follows:

*Begār* includes (a) Unpaid forced labour, and  
(b) Paid forced labour.

A. All forms of unpaid forced labour require to be abolished forthwith.

B. In pursuance of this principle it has been agreed by the Crown Representative that free forced labour, which certain States are bound to provide under their Sanads, is to be relinquished by the Crown without commutation.

C. All forced labour should be abolished as far as practical, where this is not practicable in the existing stage of development, it must be

- (a) paid for, normally in cash, at minimum rates published by authority, or in kind;
- (b) progressively reduced *pari passu* with economic and administrative development; and
- (c) properly supervised.

D. If there are any units, which are financially incapable of carrying out this policy, such units have no independent survival value.

It was generally agreed that the policy, embodied in the above conclusions, could be implemented without detriment to legitimate administrative requirements. In fact the economic development of some areas was such that it had been found possible to abolish all forms of forced labour already.

The various classes of *begār* were then discussed in relation to this policy.

1. *Athwara* (Personal service to the Ruler). It was accepted that this was objectionable and should be abolished at once. As it formed, with road *begar*, part of the land tenure, it should be commuted into a cess.

The percentage of the revenue at which this commutation should be made was then discussed, and it was found that in States in which commutation had already been made, the total cesses were usually found to be between 37<sup>1/2</sup>% & 22%.

It was finally agreed that, except in very exceptional circumstances, the total cesses should not exceed 33% of the Revenue inclusive of road *begar* and all other cesses and that it should vary *below* this figure in accordance with variations in the land revenue rates.

The point was subsequently raised that it was essential to specify certain maximum portion of this rate for road *begar* commutation (see under 'Roads' below), since the total of cesses in some areas was already at the proposed maximum. The general view however was that 33% should be an all-round maximum, and that in the areas in which this maximum had been reached a reduction was required, before commuting road *begar*.

2. *Batrawal* (construction of buildings etc.). It was agreed that there was no justification for this form of *begar* and it should be abolished without commutation. Any works hitherto carried out by this means should in future be provided for in P.W.D. budgets and done departmentally.

3. *Hela* (special occasions). Provided this labour was paid for in kind or cash and the demand maintained, its 'paternal' character, there was no harm in its continuance. People enjoyed '*tamasha*' and should be

allowed to contribute to it in the customary way. It would however be realised that any abuse of this custom by a single Rular would inevitably lead to its abolition.

4. *Dak* (official post and messages). It was pointed out and accepted that in certain districts this begar was essential, and that provided it was paid for it should continue. It should be progressively reduced by the introduction of departmental dak runners of the system in vogue in British India of village 'Chowkidars' or 'Garhwars' paid for from the usual cess.

5. *Gaonsar* (porterage). This was essential, on payment, until there were adequate bridle paths, and plenty of animal transport available. The demand could be progressively reduced by a road development programme; by encouraging *chaudhris* to maintain mules and ponies for hire; and by organising State stables for providing animals for State Officials, mule and pony breeding might also be encouraged.

6. *Shikar* (beaters). This might be allowed, if paid for. As a rule beaters come forward voluntarily and enjoy the sport. It would be realised however that, if there was abuse in individual cases, abolition would result.

7. *Roads* (1) On motorable roads begar should be abolished, and works should be done through the P.W.D. by paid gang labour, contractors, etc.

(2) Village paths in outlying tracts are normally made and maintained by the villagers themselves and no compulsion is required.

(3) Most bridle paths must however be classed as essential and paid begar would be necessary, if voluntary labour was not forthcoming.

(4) There was no question of begar being used on forest path, So these should be looked after by the Forest Department.

It was agreed that road begar should be commuted wherever feasible i.e. where labour was forthcoming on payment through *chaudhris* or village headmen. Where it was not forthcoming some compulsion or persuasions was required. This would be the case in many areas, as no regular labour class existed in most hill States.

It was suggested that labour could be made available in most areas by offering the village or the villager the choice between cash



commutation and labour at scheduled rates, recording the result in the record of rights and maintaining this position until the next settlement. For this purpose it was suggested that the commutation of road *begar* should be expressed as definite proportion of the general commutation of *begar* and other cesses, and should be a maximum of 10%, leaving 23% as the maximum for all other cesses.

**Financial Implications.** From a report compiled by the Political Agent it appeared that in most cases there would be financial advantage to the State as the result of commutation. This conclusion was not questioned by the meeting.

**Conclusion.** It was agreed that the Resident should report to the Crown Representative that the policy regarding *Begar* had been explained and generally accepted, and that reports would be furnished (say) every six months by the States concerned as to the progress achieved in applying this policy.

II. **Beth** It was stated that *beth* could be defined as an obligation to render personal service in return for certain in cultivating rights and that these *bethus* consisted of two classes:

1. *Bethus* employed by the State.
2. *Bethus* employed by zamindars.

There was also a third class of *bethu*:

3. Indebted *bethus*, i.e., persons who had taken loans in return for which they agreed to work or supply good in lieu of interest: the principal never being liquidated.

**Class I.** It could be assumed that the rendering of personal service as a condition of land tenure was opposed to the public conscience as having an element of slavery, and required the earliest possible elimination. The only exception that seemed justifiable was in regard to *Palki* service, since if this was not admitted the ladies of ruling families in the hills would never be able to leave their homes. It was agreed that such service should be paid for.

It was suggested that States should commute class (1) service into cash forthwith on the following lines

(1) Occupancy rights should be given to those who had worked in their lands for three generations.

(2) Others should be made tenants at will on a cash rent.

If (1) was likely to embarrass Rulers, by establishing occupancy tenants too close to the Ruler's dwelling, the Ruler should have the right to exchange such lands for similar lands further away.

The land revenue assessment for occupancy rights should be fixed at double the normal land revenue, plus cesses.

With regard to the necessity of giving occupancy rights *Bethus* of three generations, two questions were raised-

(a) How was cultivation for three generations to be proved?

(b) As 'service' was included in definitions of rent in the Punjab Land Tenancy Act, why need it be eliminated?

It was suggested that in the case of (a) the onus of proof that a *bethu* had not been in possession for three generations lay on the owner of the land.

In the case of (b), it was thought that, if a *bethu* went to court under the provisions of the Punjab Tenancy Act, the Court would never decree that personal service was legally enforceable.

The Rana of Balson and the Tikka of Koti asked for further time to furnish their considered views on these points.

The Resident agreed that he would await until 15th September any representations in this connection from any Ruler, either singly, or jointly. The Rulers of Koti, Dhami, Balsan and Bashahr were believed to be those primarily interested.

**Financial Implications.** The financial implications were considered and it was understood that commutation at double the normal revenue, plus cesses, would be adequate and generally advantageous to the States.

**Class 2.** It was admitted generally that, in the case of *bethus* employed by zamindars, there were fewer complaints than in the case of those employed by states; presumably because the former were in closer daily contact with their masters and the latter received demands through minor State servants, who were perhaps inadequately supervised.

Having regard to this and to the fact that these *bethus* had or could find their remedy in the State Courts, which observed vis a vis their masters (the zamindars) the provisions of the Punjab Tenancy Act, it was

agreed that attention need not be paid to their position at present: their actual status and any hardship arising therefrom could be considered in each area at the next settlement.

*Class 3.* This was defined by the Resident as a kind of agricultural serfdom, and it was stressed that under this system the individual and his children after him often remained in serfdom permanently.

The general sense of the meeting was that the prevalence of this system was primarily the result of ignorance or lack of appeal to the law, which provided the necessary remedies. In most areas there were enactments providing for relief of indebtedness, or where there were not it was suggested that they should be introduced. It was agreed that no legislation should be introduced in advance of that in force in British India: but that a great deal could be done by each administration to see that the remedies provided by the law were actually brought into operation.

### *Conclusion*

In summing up, the Resident said that it seemed that the policy regarding *Beth* should be as follows:

In the case of:

- Class (1), personal service should be abolished, with the one exception, at present, of *Palki* on payment. Any *bethu* should have the right to establish in the Courts, both against the Ruler and the State, occupancy rights in accordance with the Punjab Land Tenancy Act, and this should be allowed forthwith. The Ruler and the State should similarly clarify the position of other *bethus* as tenants at will on cash rents.
- Class (2), as already by law the *bethu* had his remedy, the position could wait further consideration till the next settlement in each area.
- Class (3), States should ensure that specific provincial debt relief legislation (or extracts to be codified by the Legal Remembrancer) was in force in their area and should encourage the individual to sue for his rights.

The Resident added that any representations regarding the policy suggested for class (1) would be awaited until the 15th September, after which date he would forward his recommendations for a model policy regarding *Beth* to the Crown Representative.

J.R.

35/31-8/43."



## *Appendix-5*

“Proceedings of the meeting of Rulers and Representatives of Simla Hill States, held at Woodville, Simla, on the 10th of November, 1943.

### *Present*

Raja Sahin Baghat in Chair and proxy for Beja State.

Raja Sahib Jubbal and proxy for Darkoti State.

Raja Sahib Dhami.

Raja Sahib Sangri.

Raja Sahib Kuthar.

RAja Sahib Mehlog

Thakur Sahib Theog.

R.S. Lala Nathu Lal, Puri, Wazir, Nalagarh State.

R.S. Pt. Basant Lal, Manager, Keonthal State.

Mr. J.C. Singha, Manager, Bhajji State.

Rao Sahib Raghubir Singh, Wazir, Baghal State.

L. Haveli Ram, Wazir, Kumarsain State.

S. Balwant Singh, Wazir, Kunihar State.

Kanwar Jagjit Singh for Bushahar State.

S.B.S. Gian Singh for Koti State.

Mr. Chuni Lal for Tharoch State.

✓ Mr. Pritam Dass, Wazir Khaneti and Rawingarh.

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The minutes of the meeting held on 24th August, 1943, at the Foreign Office Building, Simla, to consider the Policy against Beth and Begar in Punjab Hill States, under the presidentship of Hon'ble the Resident, was discussed and the following resolutions were passed:



1. It was unanimously decided that forced labour be abolished.
2. It was decided that paid forced labour should continue if the labour be not available and bye laws should be made to ensure that labour will be forthcoming on the rates fixed.
3. It was unanimously agreed that Athwara should be abolished.
4. *Road Begar.* The house resolves that suggestions of the Hon'ble the Resident about the cess be accepted with the proviso that the persons should be given the option either to pay the cess or render service as heretofore.
5. It was unanimously resolved that Bethrawal be abolished.
6. It was further agreed that Hela be maintained as recommended by the Hon'ble the Resident.
7. It was resolved that suggestions about Dak be accepted.
8. Unanimously decided that suggestions about Gaonsar be accepted.
9. Unanimously resolved that suggestions about Shikar be accepted.
10. *Roads.* Suggestions about roads were accepted.
11. The question of beth was taken up and discussed at length and it was decided that the Ruler should have the right to exchange the lands of the bethus who establish occupancy right too close to the dwelling of the Ruler for similar lands further way as recommended by the Hon'ble the Resident
12. The question of occupancy rights was left for consideration for the 11th November, 1943, as Legal Remembrancer was invited to give legal opinion on the point.

### *Education*

13. Recommendation of the Special Committee on Education was considered and accepted.
14. Item No 4 of the agenda for the meeting of Education Conference to be held in the Political Department Building was taken up & considered. It was unanimously resolved that the Central Executive Committee be the Executive Committee for all purposes.

15. It was further resolved that a committee of following persons be appointed to draft the model rules of service etc., for the education department.

R.S.L. Nathu Lal Puri, Chariman and Convener.  
 Headmaster of Nalagarh High School.  
 Headmaster of V.D. High School, Solan.  
 Headmaster of Rampur Bushahar High School.

16. Item No. 8 of the Political Agent's agenda regarding contribution from neighbouring States, was considered and it was unanimously resolved that this question was not necessary as no state is prepared to take contribution for students coming to its school for acquiring education from adjoining.

17. The constitution and other matter dealt with by the Special Committee are forwarded to the Special Sub Committee for disposal and report.

The rules should be approved by the house and a copy of which should be sent to the Political Agent for information.

18. The house passes a resolution of condolence on the sad and untimely death of Pt. Jai Deva, Distt. Inspector of Schools, Simla and further resolved that copy of the same be sent to D.I.P. Lahore and Inspector of Schools, Ambala Division and Political Agent, with the request that the same be sent to the members of the bereaved family.

19. Unanimously resolved that a subcommittee consisting of the following members be formed to prepare the schedule of laws for the legal remembrancer.

R.S.Pt. Basant Lal, Chairman.  
 L.Haveli Ram, Wazir, Kumarsain State.  
 Pt. Chuni Lal, Tharoch State.

20. The question of having a prosecution agency in the States was considered and unanimously decided that the same be accepted."

## Appendix-6

It is regarding *begar* with wages

"To

All Simla Hill Darbars

Dated Simla, the 2nd April 1946.

Reforms - Beth and Begar

Memorandum.

It has been the experience of Darbars that the provisions relating to taking forced labour for the purposes permissible in the model begar policy enclosed with this Agency letter No. 2J-2229/86-J/39, dated the 20th October 1944 are liable to be ineffective in the absence of a prescribed penalty for refusal to render paid labour. The following amendment to the model policy is therefore suggested.

It is hoped that the Darbar will have no objection to their concurrence there to being presumed if no reply to this letter is received within two months.

**"8. Penalty**

(a) Any adult male who is not, by reason of health or otherwise, exempt from rendering forced paid labour, and who refuses to render it, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs. 20/-

(b) Such fine shall be imposed by a revenue court.

(c) It shall be recoverable by the same procedure as an arrear of land revenue."

✓

Political Agent,

Punjab Hill States."

## *Appendix-7*

The report submitted by Bushahr State on the *beth* and *begar* policy of the state.

“From

The Wazir  
Bushahr State,  
R A M P U R

To

The Political Agent,  
Punjab Hill States,  
S I M L A

*Dated Rampur, the 18th May, 1946.*

*REFORMS - BETH AND BEGAR.*

Sir,

With reference to your letter No. R2/2/46, dated the 23rd March, 1946, I have the honour to submit the following report on the *Beth and Begar Policy* of the State.

*I. Beth.*

*Bethus of Ist Class.*

*State Basas.* The Beth Policy was introduced in the year 1944 and was applied in the 1st instance to all Bethus working on the *State Basas*. Out of 21 state Basas Beth was abolished in 19 Basas as submitted in the last year's report. The Bethus on the remaining 2 Basas viz Tipper and Bashtari were getting sufficient remuneration and had no inclination to be released from Beth. The State has, however, issued orders to effectively apply the notification in the said *Basas* also.

***Bethus of the Jagirdars of the Ruling Family***

In August 1945 the Beth Policy was further implemented by notification issued by the Darbar, a copy of which was attached with the

last year's report. As a consequence of this notification 565 Bethus on Basas 1 to 7 as given in the list, appended to this report were dealt with. The rents of 255 Bethus having occupancy rights were changed into cash rent *at double the land revenue* and cesses, assessed on their holdings, 310 were tenants-at-will. Their rent was fixed in kind at the rates prevalent in the adjoining lands.

In addition to the above Basas there are about 10 more Basas No. 8 to 17 on the list, appended. Orders have been issued to apply the notification in these *Basas* also. There are *133 occupancy tenants* and *111 non-occupancy tenants* on these Basas. Necessary changes are expected to have been effected during the current *Khasra Gurdawari*, but consolidated report regarding these Basas has not so far been received, as *Khasra Gurdawari* is still going on.

### *Bethus of the 2nd Class*

The number of Bethus belonging to the Zamindars, Jagirdars and Temples have been calculated and as a result, it has been found that there are *3015 Bethus* in all the 3 Tehsils. The Beth Policy as applied to the State Basas is going to be applied to these Bethus also and it is expected that their cases will be dealt with during the current year. In the case of the *Basas* belonging to the state and Jagirdars of the Ruling Family the state has straight-away applied the notification and cleared practically the whole lot. In the case of Bethus of Zamindars etc., the matter has to be cautiously dealt with owing to opposition on behalf of the Zamindars. As the *State Bethus* have been released a similar treatment has to be meted out to *Zamindars' Bethus* also without waiting for settlement operations, which could not be started because of the paucity of necessary trained staff and difficulties in procurement of necessary stationery and other material. The Darbar, however, are seriously thinking of applying the *Beth notification* to the *Zamindars Bethus* also.

No application was ever given on behalf of any of the Bethus for change of his status except by the Bethus of the Karangla Jagirdars, who have filed regular cases against the Bethus. The application has been kept pending till the decision of the regular suits. No application for declaration of occupancy rights has been put in inspite of publicity given to the Beth notification.



## *II Begar*

It was on 24-6-2000 that the Darbar issued a Farman by which free labour in the state was abolished. A copy of the farman was forwarded under cover of D.O. No. 864, dated the 2nd May, 1944. To implement this farman the Darbar were pleased to issue a Begar notification on 12-9-45, a copy of the notification has already been submitted. According to this notification forced unpaid labour is abolished in the State. The following kinds of forced paid labour have however, been retained.

- (i) To carry official dak and messages.
- (ii) At the time of the Officers tours.
- (iii) Tours of the Ruler and the Ruling Family.
- (iv) Special occasions.

As submitted in the last Year's report, payment is made on all these occasions. Bashahr is well-known for transport difficulties because of geographical conditions of the country. Mule transport is in many places being resorted to in place of coolie transport, but it can be said without hesitation that forced labour shall have to be retained so long as transport facilities are not made available.

No coolie class as such exist in the State. Work has to be taken from all classes in the State. At present because of Forest exploitation, war conditions, and abnormal rise in prices forced labour is being rather unwillingly given by the people. During the war, the coolie rates were enhanced.

One anna per mile per coolie for 20 seers of weight is at present being paid to the coolies.

## *III. General*

No difficulties have been experienced in dealing with the Siate Bethus or Bethus on the Basas belonging to the Jagirdars of the Ruling Family. The members of the Ruling Family have decided to release all Bethus voluntarily and it will be appreciated that out of 809 Bethus they have already released 565 Bethus regarding whom changes have been effected in the Revenue papers. The rest 244 Bethus are expected to be released during the present Khasra gurdawari and as submitted above, report is being awaited.

Bethus of the II Class form a large number totalling 3015. They are working, according to calculations made, on 37124 Bighas of land belonging to the Zamindars in addition to 31221 Bighas in possession of the Bethus, in consideration of which they are rendering beth. The situation is not free from difficulties. It is likely to tell upon the economies of the Zamindars and in some cases to seriously embarrass the Bethus themselves. The matter however, cannot be deferred indefinitely. The Darbar are seriously contemplating ways and means to effect change without the least resistance from the quarters, concerned.

The Darbar expect that by the end of the current year a good deal of work will have been done and a majority of the Zamindars Bethus will have been released without much difficulties.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

Wazir,

Bashahr State."

*DSR.*

*"List of Bethus Class I.*

S. No.	Name of the Basa	Number of Bethus:				Prev- ious.	Rent		Remarks
		Occup- ancy Tenants	Tenna- nts- will	at- Total	Present under Beth notification				
A. Tehsil Rampur									
1.	Garola	Basa	59	29	88	Service	Double the land	Change	
2.	Gaura	"	48	52	100	"	Revenue and	affected	
3.	Dhew	"	20	31	51	"	cesses in the	in the	
4.	Bathara	"	45	48	93	"	case of occupancy	Revenue	
5.	Sarahan	"	53	96	149	"	tenants and the	papers	
6.	Tiyawal	"	19	52	71	"	rent prevailing on		
7.	Karangla	"	11	2	13	"	adjoining lands in the		
	Total		255	310	565		ase of tenants at-will.		
B. Tehsil Rampur									
8.	Garasoo	Basa	15	17	32	"		Orders	
9.	Madhoag	"	3	-	3	"		have	
10.	Nau Beesh	"	2	3	5	"		been issued	
11.	Chhe Beesh	"	6	14	20	"		and report	
12.	Gopal Pur	"	52	7	59	"		regarding	
13.	Dharunja	"	11	27	38	"		changes	
	Tehsil Rohru								effected in
14.	Kaloti	Basa	-	15	15	"		Revenue	
15.	Samar Kot	"	17	4	21	"		Records is	
16.	Sainji	"	9	10	10	"		awaited.	
17.	Gangtoli	"	18	14	32	"			
	Total		133	111	244				
18.	Tipper	Basa	9	-	9	"			
19.	Bashatari	"	21	-	21	"			
	Total		163	111	274				

**List of Bethus Class II**

S. No.	Name of Tehsil	No. of Bethus		
		Occupancy	Tenants-at-will	Total
1.	Tehsil Rohru	58	816	874
2.	Tehsil Rampur	1305	450	1755
3.	Tehsil Chini	243	143	386
	Total	1606	1409	3015

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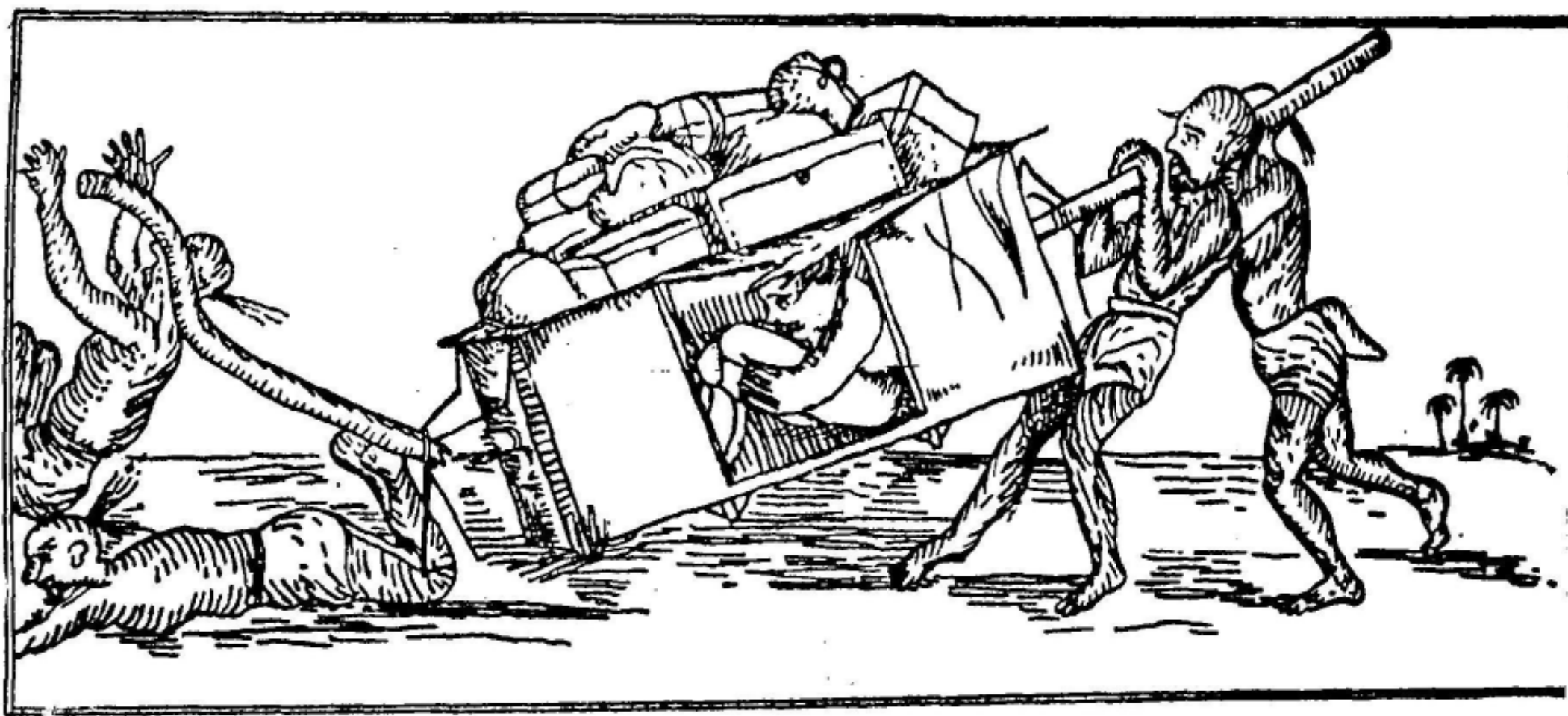
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